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SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of 10th May 2008

Dear Sisters,

The recent events in Burma and the Lebanon have been related and commented upon by the world media. I think you must all have seen the terrible images of violence in the streets of Beyrouth (Lebanon) and the distress of the refugees in the areas destroyed by cyclone Nargis in Burma (Myanmar). I imagine that your prayers accompanied all those who are suffering and that you are asking about the Sisters who are living in these regions.

The Visitatrice of the Province of the Near East, Sister Vincent Allouan was in Paris when the troubles began. Yesterday she was able to speak on the telephone with the Sisters of the Provincial House which is situated in the East of Beyrouth and they confirmed the seriousness of the situation. Lebanon is experiencing an eruption of violence, the result of internal political and religious problems, which have shaken the country during the last twenty years and sometimes give rise to civil war.

The roads are blocked between Beirut and the rest of the country. Our Sisters who are living in the South at Ain Ebel and in the North at Koyayat cannot travel to the capital. Even in the town of Beyrouth both our houses are isolated in Muslim areas. There are two big schools, Mreige and Ras Beirut where 99% of the students are Muslim and which are generally havens of peace. During the past few days both these schools had to close.

Let us pray that the violence will cease and that dialogue will begin again. We pray that Christians will remain united and be a leaven for peace in the hearts of the people of Lebanon.

As you know we do not have Sisters in Burma; but in the North West of Thailand some kilometres from Burma, at Maesot there is a Community of the Daughters of Charity who are serving about 40,000 Burmese refugees living in camps. Sister Josefina Estremera, the Visitatrice of the Province of Thailand wrote to me after the cyclone. The Sisters in Maesot tried to send aid to Burma by contacting native Sisters in Myadwadi (a region in Burma very near to Maesot). More Sisters from the Province of Thailand are asking for visas to enter Burma. They have in fact helped the Burmese workers who were affected by the tsunami on 26th December 2004 and because of this have contacts within the country, notably in Yangon. Let us pray that their efforts will be successful. They can count on the support of the Company and on our prayers.

I will end these few lines by wishing you a happy and holy feast of Pentecost in the Church and with St.Louise: "Souls that are truly poor and desirous of serving God

should place their trust in the coming of the Holy Spirit within them believing that, finding no resistance in them, He will give them the dispositions necessary to accomplish the holy will of God which should be their only preoccupation.”. *Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise*, p.802.

May the Holy Spirit inflame us with the fire of Charity and with a passion for truth.

With the assurance of my prayerful affection and devotion,

Sister Evelyn Franc
Daughter of Charity

SPECIAL 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL
ASSOCIATION

One hundred years journeying with Mary, through the Miraculous
Medal,
united with Jesus in persons who are poor

“My Spirit Glorifies the Lord My God”

These are the words that the Virgin Mary proclaimed after her mysterious yet intimate meeting with her cousin Elizabeth. The prayer is known to us all as the Magnificat.

This expression of Mary shows the sentiments of the members of the Vincentian Family, in particular those of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in this Jubilee Year in which we celebrate 100 years of the Pontifical recognition of the Association. On July 8th 1908, the Association that was born out of the appearances of the Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Laboure, was formally recognised.

Over these 100 years the Association of the Miraculous Medal has shown a number of positive aspects to be highlighted in our journey together with the Virgin Mary. From the beginning, the Association has been a very active association. The principal apostolate has been prayer to promote a greater devotion of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother. Being the first disciple of Jesus Christ she is an example for all of us of how to live our life according to the teachings of her Son.

The Association has developed this apostolate of prayer and evangelisation by means of home visits where, in a family environment, people of faith and good will fall in love with the Lord Jesus through an intimate closeness to his mother Mary. This apostolate of prayer has been developed through different means of modern

communication, principally the mail, where a network of persons who have a deep devotion to the Blessed Mary has been created at national and international levels.

Journeying with Mary over this long period of 100 years, these devotees have contributed small but very significant donations to the missions and the promotion of poor people in many parts of the world.

In the more recent history of the Association a service-apostolate has been developed in imitation of Mary who visited her cousin Elizabeth, giving to anyone in need the consolation that only the God of life can give. Together with this apostolate there has been a tremendous growth in the art of loving the poor and the Virgin Mary, the principal representative of the “anawim” of the Lord, through the formation of the members.

Another significant accomplishment in the most recent history has been a greater relationship with the rest of the Vincentian Family. Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal is the principal patron of the entire Family. Through her love and intercession for her sons and daughters, more and more young people are drawn to the Association sharing the Marian message and apostolate in favour of the poor by the witness of their lives.

The Association has responded to the new forms of poverty by promoting evangelisation and service projects for, with and from the actual circumstances of our lords and masters the poor. As an association and with other members of the Vincentian Family, it is our desire to continue journeying with Mary, united with her Son, Jesus, whom we discover in even greater depth through our closeness to those who are poor.

Without a doubt, it has been Mary, through her intercession, who has blessed this journey. We pray that she will continue to accompany us in the Jubilee Year that will last from July 8th, 2008 to November 20th 2009. We will bring to a close the Jubilee Year with our third international meeting which will take place in the rue du Bac in Paris from November 16th – 20th, 2009.

Throughout this festive year, we invite all the members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal and other members of the Vincentian Family to organise activities to promote greater devotion to our mother, Mary, and a greater love for persons who are poor, doing everything for the greater honour and glory of God.

God bless you and may you have much joy in this Jubilee Year!

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Director General of the Association of the Miraculous Medal

MARY, PROPHET AND SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND HOPE FOR
THOSE WHO ARE POOR

Mary “Prophet of a Loving God and Strength and Hope for those who are poor”

Introduction

The 100th anniversary of the Association of the Miraculous Medal being celebrated in 2008, together with the Provincial Assemblies that are taking place this year, can be seen as an invitation to contemplate Mary and learn from her how to be more and more prophets and bearers of hope.

The Church Liturgy applies to her the following words from the book of Sirach (24:18): “*Mother of beautiful love... and of holy hope...*”

In the Salve Regina, we sing: “*Hail holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our hope.*”

The preface for the Feast of the Assumption says: “*Today, the virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven to be **the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, and a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way.***”

Since the Church is prophetic and is a source of hope, the Company strives to be that as well. As Mother of the Church, “*model and teacher of the spiritual life*” (C. 23) and only Mother of the Company, Mary accompanies us each day in our vocation as Daughters of Charity. The following reflections can help to encourage us seek Mary’s guidance, she who is “Prophet and Strength and Hope for those who are poor.”

MARY, PROPHET OF A LOVING GOD

In speaking of prophets, we naturally include a reference to the story of the Chosen People as told in the Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout the course of their history, God raised up prophets for the people who were attuned to the realities of their people’s future, and it can even be said that they helped bring about this future. The story of the Chosen People tells the story of the human race.

With regard to Mary, her entire being is “prophetic”. In selecting certain aspects of her life, we will endeavour to draw parallels between them and some of the qualities of a prophet.

A PERSON OF GOD

A prophet is a messenger of God. The prophet, on receiving the Word that comes from God, is first of all called to live it out.

At the Annunciation, Mary committed herself to living according to God's Word: *"Let it be with me according to your word."* (Lk 1:38) For this reason, it was completely natural for her to say to the waiters at the wedding feast at Cana: *"Do whatever he tells you."* (Jn 2:5)

Her presence among the apostles guided them towards a greater understanding of the mystery of Christ that she had discovered progressively for herself, as she *"treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart."* (Lk 2:19 and 51)

It follows, then, that Mary is the prophet par excellence, about whom it is said: *"The Lord is with you."* (Lk 1:28), she who was *"fashioned by the Holy Spirit."* (*Lumen Gentium*, 56)

ONE WHO KEEPS WATCH

A prophet is also someone who keeps watch, who sees the dawn approaching, who looks at it as if seeing what is invisible to others.

This is Mary's special grace. She was the first one to hear that the time of waiting had been fulfilled and that God was coming to save his people. Likewise, at Cana, she was the first to sense that Jesus' "hour" had come.

Moreover, as all mothers do, Mary looks at everyone with eyes that know how to recognise what is within, what has not yet come to fruition: each person's capacity for human growth in the likeness of Jesus.

Hoping beyond all hope, Mary invites us to seek what is not yet visible in our brothers and sisters in difficulty, to help them recognise the human values within them in order to develop them.

ONE WHO IS ATTENTIVE AND DISCERNING

The prophet takes a new in-depth look at events and discovers the presence of God at work.

In the Magnificat, Mary leads us to understand what she herself contemplates; she gives us the key to re-examining situations in order to better understand how God intervenes in human affairs: God loves his people; God does everything for them, and takes special care of those who are poor and vulnerable. *"God's mercy is from generation to generation... God has lifted up the lowly...and has filled the hungry with good things..."* (Lk 1:50-53)

Mary teaches us how take an in-depth look at our life and our interactions with people who are poor in order to discover how God is revealed in each moment: what God does for us, with us and through us, as well as how God speaks through the circumstances of men and women in today's world in order to bring about his loving plan for our world.

A PERSON IN SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANITY

Prophets are persons who love the people to whom God sends them. They are in union with the people in order to console and encourage them, give them back a sense of trust, and promote among them a desire to live in right relationship.

In all the events of her life, Mary manifests her solidarity with those who are in distress. We see her seeking to be a loving presence for her cousin Elizabeth, respecting the dignity of the excluded members of the society of her time (the shepherds), her attentiveness towards the married couple at Cana and her compassion towards her son who was humiliated and condemned unjustly...

In solidarity with the joys and hopes of humanity, their suffering and anguish, Mary is someone who, from her place in heaven, hears their cries and their prayers and intercedes on their behalf.

A PILLAR OF THE CHURCH

Together with the apostles, prophets too, are “pillars of the Church”: *“You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”* (Eph 2:20) God gives the Church the apostles and prophets in order to reinforce the faith and life of God’s people.

At the foot of the Cross, Jesus gives his Mother to the apostles: *“Here is your mother”* (Jn 19:26-27), so that she may support and teach them in their life of faith, hope and love. She is present in the Upper Room, with the apostles and several other women. *“These were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus.”* (Acts 1:14) She encouraged them to persevere in prayer as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Can we not also say that Mary is a precious “pillar” given by Jesus to the Church to bring all people together, leading them to her Son and bringing about reconciliation among them?

Today, Mary teaches us to become, in our times, sturdy “pillars” for the Church in order to strengthen people who are poor, helping them to become not only “friends of God” but also “pillars” of support for others.

MARY, POWERFUL SOURCE OF HOPE FOR THOSE WHO ARE POOR

Mary points out the way for us to enter into the dynamic of hope: absolute confidence in God, the need to be nourished by the teachings of her Son, the joy of discovering the action of God in the heart and life of human beings, particularly in persons who are poor. Mary experienced all this through the events that marked her life.

The situation of poor persons and their presence in such significant numbers in the Chapel at rue du Bac shows the close relationship that those who are poor have with Mary. Mary is for them someone who experienced and overcame difficulties like

the ones they themselves have to face. She is someone who, no matter what happened, knew how to maintain unwavering confidence in the faithfulness of this God, a Father who is always near and never abandons his children.

At the Annunciation, Mary accepted the invitation to collaborate in the coming of Jesus into the world in spite of the suffering that it would entail. How could she ever explain such an event to her parents and to Joseph? Would the people of Nazareth insult her and think she was a prostitute? Nevertheless, she said yes to God, becoming more aware of her solidarity with her people who were waiting for a Saviour.

In Bethlehem, Mary experienced humiliation and poverty, then persecution by Herod which resulted in their flight into Egypt and exile there. Through it all, she remained united to her Son, sharing with him his mission of liberation even to the Cross.

At Calvary, Mary experienced the suffering of her Son's persecution, torture and public execution as a criminal. Nonetheless, she continued to support him throughout these trials that would bring liberation to the world.

Woman of a people who experienced suffering and oppression, Mary is the Powerful source of Hope for the poor. She personifies God's preference for those who suffer the injustices of the powerful and those considered insignificant by human standards. "*Mary is the sacramental presence of the maternal traits of God,*" as the Document of Puebla stated. She is the sign of the maternal mercy of God towards the poor.

CONCLUSION

Seeing Mary as "*Prophet of a God in love with humanity and Powerful Hope for those who are poor,*" let us go forward with her to collaborate in God's actions on behalf of those who are poor, "*our lords and masters.*" In this way, we will be prophetic "now and everywhere."

Sister Anne Prevost
Daughter of Charity

SPECIAL 150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE APPARITIONS AT LOURDES

A window on "the other world"

In 2005, the Chapel at rue du Bac celebrated the 175th anniversary of the apparitions of Mary to Catherine Laboure, a humble servant of the poor.

In 1830, Our Lady asked us to pray to her using the words *“O Mary conceived without sin.”* Twenty-four years after this message, the Church announced the dogma of the **Immaculate Conception**.

Four years later, the Blessed Virgin appeared once again, this time to a poor young girl named Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes. There, she appeared as a very young woman, as she was at the time of the Annunciation, when she was about to receive her maternal mission. On March 25th, 1858, Mary revealed her name to Bernadette: *“I am the Immaculate Conception.”*

This year, 2008, marks the celebration of the 150th anniversary of these apparitions at Lourdes. A colloquium was organised for this occasion by the Sanctuaries in France (December 9th-11th, 2007) having as its theme: “The Message of Lourdes, from the past to the present, from the present to the future.” Over 500 people took part.

In his conference entitled “Window on the other world,” Father Doze presented a reflection on the message of the third apparition:

“I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next.”

Just as she did for Catherine and Bernadette, Mary Immaculate never ceases to come to meet us and help us pass from this world to the “other one,” to help us enter into the “other world” for which we have been created.

A WINDOW ON “THE OTHER WORLD”

La obra pura y entera hecha por Dios, en seno puro, hace reino entero para su dueño (Saint John of the Cross)¹

In order to enter into the inner dimensions of the “message of Our Lady of Lourdes,” it is necessary to be attentive to two essential points: how it all began, and how it all ended, that is, the first message of Our Lady on February 18th 1858, and what she chose as her last apparition on July 16th, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 100 days after her previous appearance.

THE FIRST WORDS OF OUR LADY

What did the Blessed Virgin say, after the remarkable silence of the first two apparitions, silence that was like a point of entrance, a preparation that centred on the beautiful sign of the cross carefully taught to Bernadette, as Bishop Perrier emphasised earlier in his presentation? We can say in passing, that this sign of the cross was the first silent sermon in this visit from heaven, and what an expressive one at that. Professor Dufo, President of the Bar Council, said to Father Sempé, who did not believe in apparitions: “If you had seen her make the sign of the cross, you would

¹ *Work done purely and entirely for God by someone with an undivided heart, becomes a kingdom where God reigns*(Max 21)

think very differently.” What did Mary say? She made a key statement, whose authentic formulation must be sought in the first book that appeared in 1869, the book by Henri Lasserre, who had direct contact with Bernadette and could not have invented it: “I promise to make you happy, not in this world but in the next.” (Let us admit that “I promise” has a different ring to it than “I do not promise”!) Why was this sentence clumsily “simplified” by what followed? We do not know.

This “other world” is obviously not just the joy of eternal life. Why? Because that would be the death of the Christian message. “*The reign of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*”, as Saint Paul said (Rom 14:17). It is today that we must live this, all the more so since Jesus confirms: “*anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.*” (Jn 5:24) Inherent in this life with God is a mysterious joy, a special wisdom that we see in the saints, in martyrs, something like the authentic signature of God. Bernadette said these words on her bed of suffering, words considered to be of the utmost importance according to Father Petitot, the Dominican author of a remarkable book written just after Bernadette’s canonisation in 1933. She pronounced these words at the end of her life on her sickbed where she suffered intense pain, holding a large crucifix that had been given to her: “*I am happier than a queen on her throne.*”

Bernadette recognised that the first part of Mary’s promise was cruelly fulfilled: “*that suffering, I have it, I am sure to have it,*” but mysteriously, her entire life, her joy, cheerfulness, extraordinary courage, humility, amazing and often prophetic spiritual depths, of which we have numerous examples, tells us all that Bernadette, during this life, had already entered “*the next world*”. She said for example, in referring to the parish church that Abbey Peyramale began to build: “*The pastor has reasons to build this church, for it will be his final home!*” (L. 196) In fact, the pastor was only able to build the crypt during his lifetime, and he was buried in it in 1877. In October 1873, she met the new bishop, Bishop de Ladoue. She was asked to share her impressions of him: “*He is short, cold in manner; but he won’t remain here long.*” (L. 338) In fact, he would die a short time afterwards. Bishop Theas used to say to university students gathered in front of the Grotto: “*You are learned, but Bernadette, she was enlightened.*”

What is the other world?

This mention of the “*other world*” in the first message from Mary is the high point of this message at Lourdes, and it seems to me that relatively speaking, it is easily understood. Mary wants to help humanity enter the *other world*,” the world for which we were created. Mary wants to do for human beings exactly what she did with her own Son, when he was faced with his first major choice in life.

When the Holy Trinity decided to bring about the Incarnation, God the Father created a world specifically created to receive his Son, and he hid him carefully in the hands of a man who was of the tribe of David, specially chosen for this role, Saint Joseph: “*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*” (Mt 1:20). The gift confided to Joseph was unique in two ways: Jesus was the only one in whom the spirit

of evil never entered and the only one in whom the Spirit of God dwelt in utter fulness.

At the end of his first letter, Saint John says something that shows its full dimension: *“We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.”* (1 Jn 5:19) Jesus explained to Saint Catherine of Sienna one day what the devil's favorite weapon is, the special element in the world on which the devil reigns. It is a highly instructive lesson (and we never understand it well enough!): *“You see, my child, all the sins with which the devil strikes at me. But see especially that horrible and abominable self-love from which comes all that is evil.”* (*Dialogues XVII*)

This explains why Bernadette had such fear of self-love! Let us remember the circle that she made on the ground in the courtyard at Nevers, saying: *“Whoever is without self-love may put her finger there!”*² She also had strong words to say to one of her companions, that the smallest proud thought would cause her to lose all of Mary's promises (L. 61). The first words that Bernadette wrote in her little personal notebook in 1873 are truly typical of the true state of her spirit: *“All who look at me will no longer see me. From this moment on I must belong entirely to God and to God alone, never to myself.”* She turned her back on self-love.

It is into this *“other world”* that Jesus was conceived, was born and grew to adulthood. This is where he was loved, guided and protected. This next world is one in which the angels are perfectly at ease because they are loved, they are not feared, they are not copied, as is the case in the here and now where *Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.* (2 Cor 11:14) Bernadette, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, knew that she was accompanied by the Blessed Virgin and her angel. (L. 240)

These two worlds continually coexist on this earth. What it is that separates them? Soljenitsyne expressed it very well when he said that he had to experience the *“the damp straw of prison life”* in order to know that there are two worlds, whose borders do not separate social strata, human beings and their ideas and religions. Rather, this border can be found in the heart of each one of us, and it is essentially moveable in nature!

A crucial scene

We need to understand now how our Heavenly Father wanted his Son to choose the next world as soon as possible.

We should point out an essential scene that corresponds to the fifth joyful mystery of the rosary, represented in the first mosaic that was restored and solemnly blessed by our bishop – something that did not happen by chance. This mosaic illustrates the first free choice made by the Word made flesh and reveals the depth of the mystery of Lourdes. What is it about?

² Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, her novice mistress, emphasised these words and Bernadette's self-love, something she would sometimes wound

Jesus is searching for his Father and he thinks that the best place to find him is the temple, *my Father's house*, as he called it. He takes advantage of his entry into adulthood as a Jew, in his thirteenth year, and his presence in Jerusalem, during a family pilgrimage, to go to the temple, certainly with the idea of remaining there. Everything was there: the temple was beautiful, the doctors of the Law were the key elements of Israel, Jerusalem was the capital city where he knew he must suffer and die. Moreover, he was very warmly welcomed there.

We know how Mary and Joseph, desperate with worry, ended up finding Jesus after a three day search. Mary cried out in a way that Father Faber, an English mystic of the 19th century, compared with Jesus on the cross crying out to his Father. "*Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.*" (Lk 2:48) And Jesus appeared to be dumbfounded: why were they searching for him? Why did they say that Joseph was his father? Did they not know that he needed to be in his Father's house? Complete lack of comprehension. And Jesus silently brings about a solution in doing three things, three clearly indicated verbs in the Greek text: "*he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.*" (Lk 2:51) We know about this from Mary herself who "*treasured all these things in her heart.*"

What happened exactly? Mary and Joseph would bring Jesus from this world, a dangerous one, from this splendid temple which was in the process of becoming a "*den of thieves*" into "*the next world,*" the home of Saint Joseph, a perfect world over which the Spirit of God reigned. Mary brought Jesus from the former Jerusalem to this world that was to become, thanks to Jesus, the New Jerusalem: a perfectly stable world: the world of God on earth. This choice made by Jesus can be considered as a foundational gesture for the *New Jerusalem*, it was of such great importance.

The more Jesus obeyed this man whom Mary referred to as his father, the more Jesus "*increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.*" (Lk 2:52) Even more, his humility – a humility that was truly unimaginable – helped Joseph to grow. In obeying him, *he made him his father, he allowed the heavenly Father to inhabit him in a perfectly unique manner, to which only Mary and the angels were witnesses.* These witnesses saw a double spectacle completely out of the ordinary: God became human in the person of Jesus; the humble son of David who becomes the unique image of the Father. And this wonder which develops harmoniously with great power will last until Jesus reaches the age of 30. It is during that time that he develops all his Gospel preaching, and above all he prepares for his death. When he leaves this hidden life, he has such appeal that the apostles, who have not heard him preach and who have seen no miracles, will leave John the Baptist in order to follow him.

Confidantes

Two women are particularly associated with these hidden wonders: Teresa of Avila and Bernadette.

Teresa lost her mother at the age of 13, in 1528, and tearfully called out to Mary to be her mother. Mary would be an exceptional mother for this woman who would become, through her, a remarkable daughter of Joseph. Everyone should read the way she describes it in a book recounting her life! Words cannot do justice to it: *quien no*

*hallare maestro que le enseñe oración, tome este glorioso Santo por maestro y no errará en el camino*³. These words are essential because, as we will briefly note, prayer is the only way to pass from one world to the next on earth. Joseph is the master of prayer, although very few realise this: Father Libermann, a Jewish convert who founded the Spiritans, just before the birth of Bernadette, knew it. We will see that Bernadette knew it too.

With such a teacher, the master of prayer in the Holy Family, Teresa acquired such knowledge of prayer that she became the first woman to be named Doctor of the Church. At the age of 47, the Lord asked her to establish on earth a sort of human replica of the Holy Family, of “*the next world*.” In this way, after overcoming many great difficulties, she created the first reformed Carmel, called Saint Joseph of Avila, as the Lord had asked her to entrust it to Saint Joseph.

The other woman who is referred to as a confidante is Bernadette. However, she did not have the right to speak about it and this would entail painful difficulties with her mistress of novices in Nevers, Mother Marie-Therese Vauzou. Bernadette experienced what Jesus did: she left Lourdes, as he had left Jerusalem; she went to “hide” in Nevers, as he led a hidden life in Nazareth; she gave a special importance to Joseph as Jesus did. She exchanged the Grotto for her chapel, in the garden – a little Gothic chapel that was built in 1860 – and the Sisters were astonished to see her there so frequently and for such long periods of time... “*I pray well in this chapel – Oh yes! I go there as often as I can.*” (L. 303) Another time she remarked: “*Joseph and Mary get along perfectly; in heaven there is no jealousy.*” (L. 62) She says, as did Teresa of Avila: “*When you are not able to pray, ask Saint Joseph to help you.*” (L. 238) After the death of her father, she said: “*Do you not know that Joseph is now my father?*” (L. 303)

On Wednesday, March 19th 1879, a little less than a month before her death, she very insistently asked Saint Joseph for the grace of a happy death. She died on Wednesday of Easter week, April 16th, and her Sisters, eventually had her buried in their chapel where her body remained intact for 46 years. This chapel was destroyed during a bombing by the English on July 16th 1944, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Invited into “the other world”

All humanity is invited into the “*other world*”, and it is even more important to know that this “*other world*” is hidden inside us.

There are two aspects that make up the human being: the body and the soul, the physical and psychological nature of the human, familiar realities that have been skilfully developed by Aristotle, Descartes and all the specialists. Through the influence of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a great 13th century admirer of Aristotle, the Church adopted this anthropology. As Cardinal Lubac emphatically stated in the last book he published, *Theology in History*,⁴ this anthropology is not that of Scripture or the Fathers of the Church. Saint Paul emphasised three aspects of the human person:

³ Those who have no one to teach them to pray should take this glorious Saint as a teacher: he will not lead them astray.

⁴ H. de Lubac, *La Théologie dans l'Histoire*, t. I, p. 112-199.

spirit, soul and body (I Th 5, 23). The most important of these is the *spirit*, which the Bible calls the *heart*. The *spirit* or *heart* has the same role with reference to the body and the soul, as does *love* in the relationship of a man and a woman: it is an essential role.

Through our body and our soul, we belong to this world. However, by our spirit, as Saint Paul said, we are able to unite ourselves to the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, and “*become one spirit with him.*” (1 Cor 6:17) In this way, our entire being is transformed.

In a very striking scene in the Bible, we see the prophet Samuel searching among the family of Jesse, for according to Scripture, he must find a successor to Saul who had lost his senses. They presented to Samuel many handsome men, but none was the right choice: “*The Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, (that is, the physical and psychological) but the Lord looks on the heart.’*” (1 Sam 16:7) And so it was that they went to find the young David. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, “*You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God.*” (Lk 16:15)

The physical and psychological apparitions of Bernadette in 1858 were quite modest, but her heart was linked to the divine world.

Teresa of Avila, whom we previously mentioned, although she had not studied it, understood perfectly the difference between the soul, *el alma*, the psyche, and what she referred to as *el espíritu de mi alma*, this heart where God dwells. Even when the former becomes very agitated, the latter remains at peace and united with God.

Saint Catherine of Sienna, from the time of her childhood, knew how to withdraw with the Lord, her beloved Spouse, into what she called her “*inner room*” which is equivalent to the “*next world.*”

The human psyche, *the soul*, in its best state, can be compared to the temple in Jerusalem, with all its wealth, traditions, moral standards, intense and varied life. It is a magnificent place but it is human and it risks to become deteriorated, unfortunately! Evil spirits have ways of entering it. We know this all too well. The *heart* or *spirit* can be compared to Joseph’s house in Nazareth: humility, silence, obscurity, simplicity, poverty, but the Spirit of God reigns within it and God makes progress there! The enemy can never enter into it. This is the true “*other world*”, the heart in which God reigns!

Mary’s wish

Mary wants to accomplish in each of us what she achieved with Jesus and with Bernadette: to help us move from this world to “*the other one*” (not *the next one* but *the other one!*), from the world where humans only rely on themselves, to the world in which they depend solely on Christ; “*Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*” (Jn 15:5)

Why did Mary sorrowfully plead, repeating the word three times: “*Penance, penance, penance*”? Because there are three essential things to do: the three verbs that Jesus lived out:

- *Went down with them*, Joseph and Mary, that is, to be uprooted from the fascination of the visible world, as all Christian ascetism has taught us to do since the time of Our Lord. To be aware of the dangers in a world that is merely human: “*Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*” Jesus said to Peter. (Mt 16:23) Saint John of the Cross was carefully on guard against a false notion of the “spiritual” which could be dangerously deceptive. That brings to mind what Abbot Munier said at the beginning of the 20th century, referring to a woman he knew: “She is too pious to be converted!” We all know how difficult it is to live out this first verb, since it influences everything.

This descent is suggestive of the Cross of Jesus: it is truly difficult. Two men serve as incomparable guides: Saint John of the Cross, the master of Carmel, for theoretical knowledge, and Roger Vittoz, a physician who died in 1925, for the practical aspects. The latter invented a remarkable method of cerebral control that is indispensable here.

- *He came to Nazareth*, entered into this hidden and silent world of the heart, a world of prayer, in order to experience God on earth. Here as well, Teresa of Avila and Carmel have an exceptional contribution to make. Father Caffarel, founder of the Society of Notre Dame, believes that it is impossible to be a Christian today without devoting a little time each day to prayer. This implies, of course, the use of Sacred Scripture.

- *He was obedient to them*. The obedience that Jesus practised was not just spiritual but was physical as well. It was lived out by his hands and feet. To act, to obey in a concrete way, is a fundamental part of the Gospel message. Moreover, it was through a concrete gesture, the new sign of the Cross, that everything began at Lourdes. It is also a very concrete fact that persons who are sick or have disabilities continually receive care at Lourdes.

These three verbs correspond to the three aspects of human reality: the first concerns the psyche, *the soul*, the aspect that Jesus invites us to ask: “*Ask and you shall receive.*” The second deals with *the heart or the spirit*, which is invited to seek: “*Seek and you shall find.*” Finally, the third aspect involves *the body*, which is invited to knock: “*Knock and the door shall be opened.*” (Mt 7:7)

Why is the experience of Lourdes so striking? Because Mary helps us to have a sense of “*the next world*”, the real one, this “*other world*” that everyone seeks, more or less consciously, and she invites us into it. This experience is all the more powerful today as we recognise that, unfortunately, hell is not far from us!

OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

It is not difficult to understand why Our Lady chose the date of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to silently take leave of Bernadette. Teresa of Avila and John

of the Cross give us incomparable knowledge and impetus to enter into this spiritual world for which we have been created by God and saved by Jesus Christ.

Teresa gave a wonderful description of human beings who having been freed of themselves and their passions, are able to pass from this world to the other, where the Holy Spirit's role can finally be fulfilled. The first world *leads to death*, the second, *to life and peace*, as Saint Paul said. (Rom. 8:6) Teresa's book *Interior Castle* describes the journey that goes from mortal sin to union with God through seven stages. We do not have time to speak much about this, but it is important to emphasise the great importance of the middle stage, the fourth one, which marks the passage from one world to the other one. "*Before I begin to speak of the fourth Mansions...I should commend myself to the Holy Spirit, and beg Him from this point onward to speak for me, so that you may understand what I shall say about the Mansions still to be treated. For we now begin to touch the supernatural and this is most difficult to explain unless His Majesty takes it in hand...*" (*Interior Castle*, 4th Mansion, chapter 1)

The fourth Mansion represents the process of Mary coming to search for humanity in Jerusalem, in this world, to bring us to Nazareth, to "*the other world*".

The third Mansion seems very enviable: persons there are full of good qualities and piety, but they lack a "something extra" as Saint John of the Cross calls it, without which, they will not persevere when faced with persecution or great temptations. We have had abundant examples of this in the 1970s. These people have remained in the temple in Jerusalem. Mary has not yet succeeded in bringing them down to Nazareth!

This gives us an idea of how important this passage is. It reminds us of the *narrow gate* to which Jesus refers: *there are few who find it* (Mt 7:14), few who can connect these two worlds. It is in no way an intellectual process but rather a return to the world of the Beatitudes, a disconcerting transition that Bernadette was well able to make.

Conclusion

If we could summarise in one sentence the message of Lourdes, we could use the sentence that Mary addresses now to every person: "*Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you!*"

Mary would like to lead each person along the pathway she took with Jesus: to go from the old Jerusalem, the former temple, that is, our disturbed psyche, full of pride and untruths, to the New Jerusalem, represented by the Holy Family at Nazareth, that is, the *heart* or *spirit* where God dwells with the Holy Spirit. Mary shows us the little known significance of Saint Joseph to whom this New Jerusalem is confided, as Pope Pius IX had already proclaimed on December 8th 1870.

In order to understand the respective roles of Mary and Joseph in our spiritual life, here again, Carmel is indispensable: we read in Chapter 32 of the life of Saint Teresa of Avila what the Lord said to her when she was to open the first reformed Carmel: "You will create this Carmel. I will be with you; you will be like a star

shining in my Church. (How fortunate that religious exist!) You will confide this work to Joseph. There will be two doors: one door guarded by Joseph, and one guarded by Mary, and *I will be in the middle.*” Joseph dispels the evil forces, acting as a protecting shade: an essential responsibility that enables Mary to be open to divine forces, that is, the Holy Spirit.

Everyone understands that unless the first door closes, the second one cannot be opened. It is in this way that Jesus is the first human on which the Spirit of God was able to *descend and remain*, in a perfect manner, as the Lord said to John the Baptist (Jn 1:33). Thanks to Mary, the Spirit could *descend*, and thanks to Joseph, the Spirit could *remain*.

The three aspects of the Reign of God as described by Saint Paul: *justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*, correspond to these three persons who serve as a reflection of the Holy Trinity. Jesus is the *just one* who justifies humanity, Joseph, image of the Father, is responsible for *peace* and Mary, image of the Spirit, brings *joy*.

In conclusion, I leave you with a passage from a greatly inspired Syrian monk of the 4th century, Saint Ephraim; this is one of the most perfect hymns to the Blessed Virgin. It describes perfectly what the Lord desires for us:

*Far more glorious than the body is the soul.
And more glorious still than the soul is the spirit,
but more hidden than the spirit is the Godhead.
With the beauty of the soul the body will be clothed when the end has
come.
The soul will be clothed with the beauty of the spirit.
The spirit will be clothed in the very image of the Divine Majesty.
The body will be raised up to the heights of the soul;
The soul to the heights of the spirit,
and the spirit to the heights on which dwells the Divine Majesty.*

Father Andre Doze
Extract from the Minutes of the Jubilee Colloquium of 2008

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

Guidelines for discernment “The source of neo-pagan revelations”

Notes taken during a talk given by Fr. Joseph Marie Verlinde to the Chapel Pastoral Team on the subject of “Discernment in welcome.”

Revelation is rooted in a disconcerting divine initiative by which the Most High breaks his silence with mankind and speaks about himself to the person seeking Him, in a language that he or she can understand.

This “speaking” is also a form of “doing” because accepting the Word presupposes an ontological change in the listener who is now able, by the action of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Word, to perceive the Ineffable revealed in human language, or again, to discern the Son of God in the Son of Joseph.

This Word of God is a *Dabar*, a word-event that emerges in the midst of history and leaves its indelible trace on it. This *Debar* is not content with unveiling hidden things but more particularly it evokes a quality of newness which allows human beings to be responsible for discerning so that they can correspond to it in a different way.

The Word of God, whether this be the *logoi* of the prophets or in the *Logos* incarnate, appears as a call to dialogue and to conversion of life. It snatches us out of our empty preoccupation with self to bring us squarely before the absolute desire for change: it comes to criticise in a radical fashion any claim to self-sufficiency. But it is also an outstretched hand which snatches us out of our narcissism and awakens in us a personal awareness of what is specifically, our knowing that we are open to transcendent Mystery.

True freedom is only possible when it is founded on this initiative in which God proposes that we become partners in the Covenant, and so obliges us to respond in a personal way. But what glory it is for human beings to have this responsibility with regard to the absolute Transcendent who allows himself to be accessible in Revelation by communicating with the one who is speaking to him!

In this encounter that He initiates and makes possible, God offers us the power to become, by our free choice, His children.

The following are characteristics of divine Revelation:

- an initiative taken by a personal, transcendent God who is Creator;
- who reveals himself in a Word which summons human beings to dialogue;
- in which God gives the person access to a new life which is completely beyond the powers of created nature to gain access;
- something which man can only reach through faith in Jesus, Lord and Saviour who purifies him from his sins and lets him share in his own life in the Spirit.

It is quite true that the term “revelation” can have several meanings in everyday language: do we not speak of the “revelations” of such and such a politician? But in the study of comparative religions it has a very precise meaning, the one we will briefly sketch out.

The new naturalistic paradigm which is coming into vogue in our times to the detriment of the old Judeo-Christian creationist paradigm, this famous New Age paradigm, is particularly marked by what Professor Fuss calls a parasitic character. By this we mean that it borrows from religious traditions a certain number of key terms which it then proceeds to recycle in the way it presents itself but it gives the terms a completely different meaning. In doing this it creates confusion and skilfully uses this for its own ends.

So we will make a quick check on whether the term “revelation” that is widely used in New Age “religions” is appropriate or whether it is a misuse of language that leads to confusion.

The general characteristics of Judeo-Christian Revelation that we gave a quick outline of earlier, will serve as criteria for discernment with regard to the multiple “revelations” offered today in the spirituality market.

To simplify our tour of new religiosities we could group them by “families”, that is to say, on the basis of a certain similarity of origin.

REVELATIONS OF EASTERN ORIGIN

The inspirational sources of neo-oriental groups are to be found mainly in the sacred texts of the Indies and Japan. These do not present themselves as “revelations” but rather as collections of “manifestations” of the divine cosmos; drawn most particularly from the mystical experiences of the sages.

It is clear that the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna does not belong to the order of “revelation”: it is a philosophical discourse presented in the form of a myth. The Mahabharata does not claim to be a work of revelation in the sense that we understand this term.

The pandits to whom I put this question recognise that the concept of revelation has little place in the naturalist philosophy that lies behind eastern traditions.

The ontological boundary of these religious philosophies is, in fact, an emanational monism which excludes any reference to a transcendent and personal God. Rather, it would denounce this as an illusion that reveals once again the world of dualism.

Seen from this perspective, man is a divine emanation who most certainly does not remember his origins but has no need of “salvation.” The most he can do is to benefit from the counsels of a Master who is further along the path of enlightenment than he is.

This Master will initiate him into the appropriate physical and mental techniques needed for putting an end to the manifestations of his own feelings and enable him to achieve by his own efforts the state of consciousness or illumination called Moksha, Samaddhi or Nirvana, according to different traditions.

Granted the profound doctrinal differences that we have just sketched out, these propositions should logically be able to develop on the margin of Christianity without interfering with it. This is certainly not the case. A good number of neo-oriental movements feel the need to integrate the Jesus of the gospels in their presentation of their beliefs and this will inevitably lead to a profound distortion of Revelation and interpreting the Scriptures in a spirit of faith.

Jesus, guru

Generally speaking, Jesus is assimilated into these movements as a guru who, after travelling the entire path of initiation and reaching the stage of enlightenment, would have gathered around him disciples to whom he would have passed on the wisdom of the Indies.

The myth of Christ being initiated in the East is a very old one: we have it already from the pen of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). In order to “save” Christianity from all Semite contamination, this writer imagines that after the flight into Egypt, the young Jesus would have been cared for by Egyptian priests whose religion, he says, would have its origin in Hinduism.

Much closer to our own times, Swami Siwananda, founder of “The Divine Life Society whose ashram is in Rishikesh, Himalaya, teaches a similar myth: Jesus would have spent all his youth – from the episode in the Temple to his baptism – in the Indies where he would have practised yoga, living among Hindu and Buddhist monks. Having become a perfect yogi, he would have returned to his own country and would have taught a doctrine closely linked to Hinduism and Buddhism. His teaching, however, would have been misunderstood and altered by the people who set it down in writing generations later.

We would find it hard to believe that such a well-known Hindu Swami would have thought it necessary to “retrieve” Christ in this way to make him an eminent representative of his own religious philosophy. According to this writer, so-called Christian Revelation would only be a westernised and distorted form of Hinduism.

However, there are very few writers who would risk taking this retrieval theory to its ultimate conclusion because the significance of the Cross, apart from any soteriological interpretation, would create a serious problem. In fact, for a Hindu or a Buddhist, Jesus on the Cross could only expiate his bad “*karma*” which he had accumulated through crimes committed in a previous life. In other words, during his Passion he was paying the price demanded by the implacable law of retribution.

This brings with it the difficulty of reconciling this sad ending that revealed a frustrated soul that had made little progress on the path of enlightenment, with the status of guru that some people would have liked to accord him in order to attract Christians to their teaching.

Jesus, avatar

Eastern writers with connections to these neo-oriental movements are even more daring when they associate Jesus with being an “*Avatar*.” In Hinduism, this term implies the intervention of Vishnu in the course of cosmic evolution with a view to re-establishing universal law- the “*Dharma*.” Jesus would have been an avatar just for our western world.

Hindu tradition is more reticent about this western retrieval of the teaching of avatars, the number of whom is traditionally clearly defined for each period of the cosmic manifestation. In theory Buddha was the penultimate embodiment of the most important avatars; he succeeded Krishna, and we are now waiting for the tenth and

last avatar in the present cosmic cycle, called “*Kalki*” in the Hindu religion and “*Maitreya*” in Buddhism.

This is why Benjamin Crème, in an effort to synthesise all Traditions, announces the return of Christ under the name of Maitreya, the “Universal Teacher, whose mission would be to inaugurate the one and only religion of our planet.

All these speculations are useless, given the profound difference between the concept of the avatar and that of the mystery of redemptive incarnation. Vishnu is an impersonal Principle, a modality of the divine Being who could in no way “incarnate” itself in the proper sense of the term.

Moreover, the avatars do not necessarily manifest themselves in human form: Vishnu first appeared as a fish and then in the form of a tortoise. No connection at all with our concept of the mystery of the Incarnation in which the Word – in whom resides “*all the fullness of divinity*” (Col 2,9) takes flesh in a very real way and does this “*once and for all.*” (Heb 7, 27; 9, 12).

It is very easy for us to see how the attempts made by neo-oriental movements to integrate the person of Christ of the gospels into eastern teachings, does violence to Christian Revelation and could only be achieved at the cost of an unacceptable betrayal of the dogma of the redemptive incarnation.

THE ESOTERIC “REVELATIONS.”

Some principles

The different esoteric schools converge on a certain number of established principles, three of which are relevant to what we are discussing.

1. Esoteric cosmology presents itself as a vast theogony. The different teachings develop from an emanational pantheism. After a series of differentiations within the primordial Oneness, the universe emanates from the Divine Being through the action of two contradictory principles which both determine its evolution.

2. The spiritual principle that man is a divine spark which progressively sinks into the most “dense” layers of the Divine Being until it reaches its “periphery” or opaque matter where it loses its awareness of its origin (“involutional” journeying) Then, enlightened by its “Older brothers”, the soul remembers its divine nature and commits itself to following the path that leads back to its Source, something it will achieve after an incalculable number of incarnations, on Earth or on other Planets or Stars (“evolutionary” journey).

3. Initiation plays a primordial part during this evolutionary voyage. It is transmitted by people who are further advanced along the path, and it allows the successful disciple to go through the stages which will allow him to progressively become conscious of his divine nature.

A misuse of language

We are brought back to our earlier statement: in the absence of a transcendent and personal God there can be no “revelation” properly so-called. So it is a misuse of language to speak of esoteric or neo-gnostic “revelations.”

The term is used, however, in one of the fundamental esoteric principles, namely, the famous “revelation” of Hermes Trismegiste, set down on the legendary Emerald Tablet.

This corpus which sets out a perfect similarity between all levels of manifestation, does not tally, however, with any of the criteria for “revelation” in the Judeo-Christian sense of the term. This law of correspondence is rather a principle of interpreting phenomena, which is a point of reference for all literature classed as “hermetic.”

Non-divine assistance

For esotericism, every man will sooner or later come to discover his divine immanent nature without needing any external form of intervention. At the very most, the Adept can benefit, as we said earlier, from advice given by “Older Brothers” who have been commissioned by the Hierarchy of Spirits to help him on his evolutionary journey on this earth.

These interventions can appear in different forms, from “*channelling*” - the contact that a medium has with a higher spirit which gives him instructions - to “precipitated messages”, that is, the materialisation of information

These diverse forms of contact with parallel universes have been widely used by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) who claims to have written, on the instructions of the Tibetan “Mahatmas, *Isis Unveiled* and more particularly *The Secret Doctrine*. These sages would have transmitted their instructions and teachings through “astral messages” received either by telepathy – *channelling* – or by “precipitation.”

These Tibetan Masters would have presented themselves to her as beings that had evolved from outside the human domain and who were continuing their journey on higher planes. They are part of the “Great White Universal Lodge” which is responsible for accompanying the evolution of mankind during its time on Earth, most particularly at the dawn of the new era of the Aquarius constellation that it is proclaiming.

We go back once more to our original statement: rather than speaking of “revelation” we should call it a series of teachings that divulge knowledge which is still inaccessible to embodied spirits such as we are, but which is currently available in the “*akashic archives*” for all who have developed their astral medium powers. According to esotericism, we will all individually reach this stage at a given time during future incarnations.

In the two works quoted, Mme Blavatsky claims she is commenting - always under the inspiration of the Mahatmas -on a rare and unique document, only one copy of which is in existence and is entitled *The Verses of Dyzan*. All sacred books from every culture and religion would have been based on these Verses which describe in a

symbolic way the history of cosmic evolution from the earliest times to the Dark Ages which coincide with the death of Krishna, some 5200 years ago.

On closer inspection, these *Verses* are not “revelation” either. They are, in fact, presented as a vast dissertation on the internal events leading to the emergence of a Divine Being. So it is not a matter of a Word spoken by a personal and transcendent God to a human being with a view to dialogue, but rather a sort of collection of writings that seers can consult to know at what point we are at in the involution/evolution of the current cycle of manifestation.

Esotericism, moreover, does not claim to bring any new revelation but simply to unveil what lies hidden to the average person. The objective of this secret knowledge is not simply theogenic teaching, but also, and more especially, to give a person self-knowledge: during the initiation rite, the Adept is first of all “revealed” to himself. The “hidden word” which is mentioned in the free-masonry ritual is not a reference to a Divine Other, but evokes the immanent and supposedly divine word that the initiation experience is felt “to reveal” to the candidate and which allows him to dispense with all exterior Revelation.

Strained relations with the Church

Mme Blavatsky is a rare exception in that she does not, as others have done, try to integrate Judeo-Christian revelation into a philosophical system even at the expense of significant “corrections.” She is a particularly severe critic of Christianity, or more precisely the Church, which she accuses of having deliberately hidden esoteric knowledge of Christ in order to maintain its power over the faithful.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky is exceptional above all else for defending the theory of the non-historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. His story, as told in the New Testament, would be just an allegory, based on esoteric truths. The name of this allegorical figure in the myth would have been borrowed from a certain “*Yehoshua*” born at Lud or Lyddia about the year 120 BC.

Interpretations of Christ that are anything but Christian

This approach is hardly a new one: taking inspiration from the Gnostic writers of the early centuries, A. Besant introduces a Jesus who was initiated into the mysteries of the Essenes and the Egyptians and who allowed himself to be overshadowed¹ at the moment of his baptism in the Jordan, by a glorious Being belonging to the great spiritual hierarchy directing the evolution of our humanity.

Rudolph Steiner, a dissident Theosophist and founder of Anthroposophy, complicates still further the relationships between this Most High spiritual entity that we call “Christ” and “the Jesuses” involved.

Basing his ideas on a not very fundamentalist interpretation of the accounts of Jesus’ childhood, this writer discovers that there were in fact two infant-Jesuses. In

¹ To cover with a shadow. In the terminology specific to esotericism, and more especially white magic, to be covered with a shadow, or the act of overshadowing, is a noble and non-restrictive form of possession by an entity that has reached a very high level of spirituality.

the child descended from Salmon mentioned in Matthew's gospel, there would have been incarnated the person of Zarathoustra who would have existed in this form until the Jesus of Matthew's account reached the age of twelve.

At this age Zarathoustra would have left the body of this Jesus and would have moved into the body of the Lucan Jesus, the descendant of Nathan. He would have remained there until this second Jesus was thirty years old.

Finally, at the baptism in the Jordan, Zarathoustra would have left this second body of Jesus also, to be replaced by the cosmic person of Christ.

Nothing of all this belongs to the order of "revelation." R. Steiner claims to have acquired this knowledge through a direct vision into the memory of the Akasha which preserved the astral traces of every terrestrial event.

THE OCCULT "REVELATIONS"

Occultism can roughly be defined as the application of esoteric principles. So we do not find "revelations" in occultism any more than we do in esotericism. Nevertheless, if we mention this "science" it is because of the huge recuperation of Christ of the gospels by certain writers such as Samael Aun Weor, founder of the international Gnostic Association (or Church).

As a gnostic writer he should have figured among the esotericians we have just been discussing. But since S. Aun Weor took on the role of propagator of a "Christic tantrism" based on the mastery of astral energy through "*magia sexualis*" we thought it more appropriate to present him under the label "occultism."

As a good Gnostic, this writer insists on the non-historicity of Christ: he is not at all interested in the Jesus of history. The gospels were written by the initiated for the initiated. The person who possesses the keys to hermetism discovers in the trajectory of Jesus Christ, the cosmic drama of initiation that every man must pass through one day. The aim of this initiation is to form in us the superior Astral that Aun Weor designates by the name of Christ. The recommended technique for developing this subtle entity is to use the divine wisdom of the serpent, that is to say, sexual magic.

The serpent is nothing other than the *kundalini* that tantrism speaks about and which our writer calls either the "Christic Fire" or "The Holy Spirit." This astral energy is supposed to rise through the appropriate channels from the base of the vertebral column to the top of the skull where it brings on "illumination." All through this process of ascent the *kundalini* opens successively the five intermediary *chakras* between the root *chakra* and the coronary *chakra*, releasing at each stage the corresponding occult powers.

We cannot help being surprised by this author's interpretation of the gospels. We learn from him that Jesus would have practised sexual magic and explicitly invites us to do likewise when he speaks of passing through the "narrow gate" in order to enter the Kingdom. The Great Work that Christian Revelation speaks to us about would consist entirely of the sublimation of sexual energy stimulated in a carnal restraint during which a man would refrain from ejecting his semen so as not to lose

any of the corresponding astral energy and to allow this to rise up to the coronary *chakra*.

Our author justifies the liberty he takes with biblical texts and especially his interpretation of them by the calm affirmation that the Gnostic Church is the only one to have preserved the original Greek texts of the Scriptures.

So we cannot speak here of a new “revelation” but of an original interpretation of revealed truth or more precisely, of a recuperation of Christian revelation to the benefit of teachings and practices that are completely foreign to it.

THE “REVELATIONS” OF THE SPIRITS

Spiritualism

Contrary to the “spiritual families” that we have examined so far, spiritualism explicitly proclaims a new “revelation.” In his work that bears the significant title *The Gospel according to spiritualism*, the spiritualist theoretician Allan Kardec – alias Hyppolite Rivail (1804-1869) – develops the idea that God would have completed and accomplished the first two historical revelations by a third economy that would be the ultimate and definitive one.

After the Law handed down through Moses, and the New Testament brought by Christ, the third revelation would have been spiritualism which is not personified in any individual because it is a question of teachings coming directly from heaven through the voice of spirits speaking all over the world. It is Christ himself who would preside over this final regeneration of which he was the precursor when he prepared the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth. Was not Jesus a medium who transmitted the messages of a “spirit” that he called his “Father”?

However, we need to express once again some serious reservations with regard to the use of the term “revelation” in the context of spiritualism.

Without referring to the sparse content of these so-called “revelations”, the spirits who speak at these séances where they are invoked, have nothing of the transcendent about them: they are what A. Kardec calls “wandering souls” that is to say, spirits of the dead who after casting off their earthly shell, are awaiting reincarnation.

So Spiritualist revelation is in no way the work of God the Creator who calls man to a new relationship with him based on the ontological transformation of the human creature.

Multiple revelations of all kinds of spirits

Contemporary infatuation with “ceremonial” magic has opened the door to a series of “revelations” coming from spirits contacted during rituals that practise invocations, evocations, charms and other forms of magic.

Invocation is the term given to the ritual of high magic during which the magician summons and makes come down on him a cosmic force, generally personified as a god. The physical manifestation of this deliberate union with this entity is designated by the term “intoxication” or “possession” in theurgy, both expressions emphasising the fact that the magician has been penetrated, even to his psychic faculties, by the power invoked

This power can from that time onward, use the magician to speak oracles, to transmit power during an initiation process, and even command lesser spirits that are subject to it. Here we come across once more the broad outlines of the process of *channelling* at séances during which a medium puts him or herself in a state of receptivity with regard to a particular spirit which will make use of the medium’s psychic faculties and even their body.

Evocation is the term given to the magical ritual in which the occultist has recourse to the services of spirits over whom he has received authority by means of the “god” invoked. The magician can question the entity he has evoked and so obtain “revelations” the number of which can only increase despite the persuasive vagueness of the messages.

There is no point in continuing our analysis: it is clear that this type of revelation has absolutely nothing to do with what we understand the term to mean in the context of the Christian faith.

Other “revelations” that are a corrective to Christianity

Following on from A. Kardec’s “third revelation” we should also look into all the “revelations” that claim to continue, correct or complete New Testament revelation. So as not to weigh down our presentation, we will just mention some of the important or well-known names.

We could mention the revelations of the Risen Christ stated by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) in the *Book of the Mormons* which would lead to the establishment of the “Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints”.

But there are also the *Jehovah’s Witnesses* and *The Unification Church* of Sun Myung Mun (1920) who claims to be accomplishing Christ’s redemptive work as “Lord of the Second Coming.”

EVALUATION

Let us try to draw out some points that these many “families of revelations” have in common. As we have seen none of them can justify the use of this term.

Denial of the Transcendent

The term “revelation” is in each case emptied of its proper semantic meaning: it no longer designates the Word of the transcendent All Other speaking to his rational creature and inviting him to enter into a Covenant; but it has come to refer to the

discoveries that the Adept can make during his exploration of his own spiritual or mental potential.

This distortion of meaning thus leads to the implicit denial of the Transcendent: from now on revelation will be reduced to the unveiling of immanent truths that every person will soon or later be able to assimilate in the course of successive incarnations.

Loss of the dialogue character of Revelation

One of the points that the Second Vatican Council emphasised in the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, is precisely this dialogue character of Revelation. This is important, not just from the theological point of view but also from the anthropological aspect. It stresses

- that God who reveals himself is supremely personal, and
- that he calls man- created in his own image- to grow in this personal dimension which he already has potential for.

Self-knowledge, freedom and responsibility, all of which the person is invited to foster in response to the call of the absolute Other, appear, paradoxically, in the context of different forms of naturalism, the worst enemies of the Adept's progress towards fusion with the impersonal, divine, Self. The so-called "revelation" that results from initiation leads in fact to a path that is diametrically opposed to it since it fosters everything that is contrary to the dilution of the personal I and leads to the denial of Otherness which it deems to be illusory.

Reducing Revelation to the level of the commonplace

The denial of the transcendent Otherness of God, leads immediately to the belief that biblical revelation is only one approach among many to the divine mystery. It is no longer received as an initiative by God who comes to the help of man who is searching for the Absolute, but it is put on a par with the many religious philosophies by means of which men try to express their understanding of the Mystery.

Revelation is just one of the many "revelations" of all types that are flourishing today. It shows the same tendency to be disregarded by these other religions precisely because it affirms the divine Transcendence, a concept that naturalism associates with an outmoded dualism.

Argument about the historical character of Revelation

The cosmic god of the different branches of naturalism could not intervene in a history that is seen as a series of internal transformations into the One. History is the progressive emergence of duality and multiplicity in the primordial divine essence and as such it is just a passing illusion that men should not subscribe to at any cost.

At the very most, the divine essence manifests itself from time to time in the guise of an Avatar, to make men realise that history is a theogony in which they have a part to play: in them God becomes conscious of himself before returning to his primordial unity.

Loss of the sense of the concept of salvation

In like manner, the notion of salvation loses its meaning in the naturalistic context specific to these religious movements which proclaim man's natural divinity. What would this divine man need to be "saved" from except the persistent illusion of being one individual among many and of being subject to a transcendent God to whom he would be accountable?

The notion of "divine grace" is restored in order to designate the subtle energies of a divinised nature, and henceforth salvation is reduced to a progressive immersion into occult forces.

Since all spirits are necessarily divine, as they, too, are all divine sparks that are evolving, the term "Holy Spirit" can be used indiscriminately for any spirit that is presumed to be benign and belonging to a higher level of evolution to that of the inhabitants of our planet.

According to this doctrine, even malignant spirits, the Demons, have, a role to play in evolution: this justifies the existence of the two forms of magic, white magic and black magic. They are two complementary modalities for occult action, invoking opposing forces but both of them indispensable in the evolution of the cosmos.

The specific nature of the concept of inspiration is lost

There is no longer any need for the action of divine grace, that is to say, the intervention of the Holy Spirit, to enlighten the minds of hagiographers so that they can give a correct interpretation of the events through which God speaks to us, teaches us, corrects us and leads us. Any person can through his or her own efforts—that is to say, by using the appropriate techniques – attain the states of altered consciousness that will bring them into union with the divine forces and acquire the fullness of knowledge.

This access to the divine, however, is mediated by the "spirits" from higher worlds that the Adept must invoke by using the appropriate rituals. This theurgic aspect that is specific to high magic, inevitably leads to confusion between inspiration which is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and inspiration from the spirits on occult higher plains where the "Universal White Hierarchy" is responsible for guiding the evolution of our humanity.

The meaning of the concept of Tradition is lost

Revelation is not just set out in the Scriptures but it is handed down to us in the Word of God interpreted by the Magisterium, in the light of Tradition. So Revelation gives us access to the person of Jesus Christ, to the mystery of redemptive incarnation which, although it took place more than two thousand years ago, has remained alive and active all through history. That is why the Word should be read within the continuity of the interpretations that constitute Church Tradition.

Christianity is not a Gnostic philosophy but something built entirely on faith, the result of an encounter with the living God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ.

This meeting between the Divine Bridegroom and his Bride, the Church, reaches ever deeper levels of intensity right through their journey together towards the Parousia. That is why Revelation develops over time, not because the Church would be adding anything to the deposit of faith confided to her, but because she is always drawing from its treasures, new things and old.

We might say in the hallowed words of Maurice Blondel, and taken up by Cardinal de Lubac, *“throughout the whole of history, Tradition makes the content of faith that is implicitly lived out becomes something that is known explicitly.”*

From the time that it was founded, the Church has not ceased to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of her Lord, in the light of the Holy Spirit who sent him from the Father’s side. Guided by this Spirit of truth, she continues to seek the face of the One who gives her life, but her heart sighs for him until she can see him face to face in the full light of the Kingdom.

We would not be able to find anything of this in the concept of Tradition transmitted by the new religious movements. Since there is no founding event that could give meaning to history or guidance for the future, there would hardly be any need for a hermeneutic action to span the temporal distance that separates us. Everything is fully revealed to the one who can open himself to the most subtle levels of the omnipresent divinity because he is already within us in full measure.

In this sense we can say that the new religious movements show an eschatological impatience: they think that the Kingdom of God is identified with the revealed world, and what is more, that this world identifies itself with the divine world from which it emanates. From now on, we would already have the fullness of knowledge because we are fragments of the divinity; all we would need to do would be to become fully aware of the divine character of our nature.

From now on, there will be no need to jealously guard a deposit of faith that would be passed on from generation to generation and to enrich this deposit over time: the only thing that must at all costs be preserved without any form of alteration, is the discipline of initiation because it is this that brings us out of illusion and opens us to the divine consciousness.

So there are traditions of initiation which hand down *ne varietur* the invocatory and evocatory rituals that allow people to contact the higher beings which are supposed to introduce the Adept to higher levels of consciousness.

In his pilgrimage to the Sources, the Initiate learns gradually about Tradition. This term now designates the universal gnosis, the ultimate truth about the divine, the world and its future, about man and his destiny. This exhaustive and specifically divine knowledge of all things will be set out in the archives of the Akasha, that all the founders of every religion would consult and be inspired by. Differences, and even conflicts that arise between the religious Traditions would be due entirely to the fact that the Masters ended up distorting their words and disfiguring their teaching.

According to esotericism, this primordial Tradition is accessible to everyone who is seeking the invisible: those who consulted it would no longer need a teacher: they would have already acquired absolute knowledge, specific to the divinity, and would henceforward participate in the immortality of the one and indivisible truth.

It would be a waste of time to dwell on the gulf that separates this concept of a static, unchangeable gnosis wrongly called “Tradition”, from the truth of Revelation which is essentially the Person of Jesus Christ in whom we, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, see the Father.

Tradition is the very life of Christ at the heart of the Church, divine life which increases all through history until it reaches the full Trinitarian communion in love.

A reductive interpretation of the Person of Jesus Christ

Within the naturalist perspective of these new religious movements, Jesus may certainly be called a son of God, just as all human beings are, but he cannot claim to be the *only* Son of God. He loses all uniqueness: he is only one Master, Initiated or Guide among a great many others who preceded him and the many more who will come after him. Obviously, those who come after him will have more knowledge and power than he had because their level of evolution will be higher than his.

The Christ who, according to esotericism, must come soon – after so many others who came before him – will not be essentially different from all the divine spirits that are evolving from matter.

Moreover, the Messiah will not necessarily be an individual person: in some philosophical presentations he is more like the collective emanation of a cosmic spirit analogous with the Gnostic “*nous*.”

Faith is drained of its substance

The new religiosities, from the esotericism of Mme Blavatsky to the spiritualism of Allan Kardec, all boast that they have rendered faith useless. Everything that the believer is supposed to adhere to in faith, the new religiosities give by direct experience to their followers.

Madame Blavatsky did not hesitate to denounce faith as folly, deliberately encouraged by the Church in order to maintain its power over the masses. And Allan Kardec is unbelievably simplistic when he claims that spirits give us the power to touch with our finger the Beyond, giving us the certainty that the soul is immortal.

The implication of all this is that these writers have a reductive and negative concept of faith: they see it as lack of knowledge, lack of direct experience, emptiness, ignorance, obscurantism; in short, the darkest spiritual poverty. There is no reference to grace, to the Holy Spirit, to the theological virtues and this is to be expected: as we have seen, grace is confused with occult powers; the only means of acquiring it, according to esoteric-occultism, is to adopt initiation practices and invoke spirits.

Faith as a personal encounter with Christ and an existential adherence to him together with a loving communion with the Father in the Spirit, is completely ignored by these new religious groups

The primacy of experience

The priority given today to experience which is sought after as an absolute, that is to say, independently of the doctrinal context that gives it meaning, does not leave the faithful unaffected by it. This over valuing of so-called “spiritual” experience means that it is taken as a criterion for the credibility, or even the truth of the Tradition it is claiming.

The slogan that is very much in fashion for practical syncretism might be formulated as follows: “Theology divides whereas mysticism unites. Rather than confronting one another over texts or outmoded interpretations of them, let us immerse ourselves in experience which unites us in a way that surpasses words that separate us.”

Let us remember that “the experience of God” is not a biblical theme. From the point of view of supernatural mysticism we do not experience God in a specifically subjective state; at best such an experience could be merely psychic.

“Nobody should try to attain mystical graces through his own efforts, “warns Cardinal Balthasar; “and you cannot train yourself to attain them by any technique whatsoever. Besides, there can be no question of training since the Christological context is always the graces that flow from the Passion. Mystical states brought on by practising techniques that are in no way related to Christ’s passion have, therefore, no Christian significance.”²

The quality of my spiritual life is not measured by the intensity of my mystical experiences but by the maturity of my faith, in other words, my fidelity to belonging to Christ, my generous obedience to the Word, the depth of my repentance and the prompt and disinterested service I give to my brothers and sisters: in short, by my the welcome I give to the Holy Spirit who helps me to live in charity, *“Anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him.”*(1 Jn 4, 16)

“It is not any abstract purity but the soul’s moral purity, linked to obedience to the Church, which preserves us from illusions.

In the Old and the New Testament, withdrawing into oneself is not a matter of intellectual abstraction through concentration but rather a conversion of heart, an awareness that we have distanced ourselves from God and his commandments. Conversion means first of all that we turn our gaze away from self and look towards God and his Word which summons us and points out the way.”³

When the disciples asked Jesus, *“Lord, teach us to pray”* their Master simply turns to the One whom he calls, *“my Father and your Father, my God and your*

² H. URS VON BALTHASAR, *Nouveaux points de repère*, Fayard, Paris, 1980.pp. 117-130

³ *Ibid*

God.” (Jn 20,17) and invites them to join in his filial prayer which is utterly filled with trust, tenderness, self abandonment and adoration.

All schools of prayer have but one objective, to help us to turn to the One who knocks at the door of our heart like a beggar pleading for our love: *Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in and share his meal, side by side with him.*” (Ap. 3, 20).

We have to listen to the great masters of prayer to find out what is the essence of it, the groaning of a heart burning with the ardour of the Fire of Divine Love. To the question, “What is prayer? a famous Carmelite nun, Therese of Lisieux, replies: “*A loving conversation with God. A friendship with Him in which you feel yourself loved. A movement of the heart, a simple glance towards Heaven, a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trials or joys; something wonderful and supernatural which expands my heart and unites me to Jesus.*”⁴

Cardinal Balthasar’s thinking is on the same lines when he writes: “*All Catholic meditation is supremely Christological. It is in the indissoluble union between God and man in Jesus Christ, that we find for every believer, as well as for the Church throughout history, the way, the truth and the life.*”⁵

Saint Teresa of Avila lived at a time, when similarly to our own days, there was a great curiosity about spiritual things and she reminded her readers: “*It will also seem to you that anyone who enjoys such lofty things will no longer meditate on the mysteries of the most sacred humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a person would now be engaged entirely in loving. I myself see that the devil tried to deceive me in this matter, and so I have learned my lesson from the experience. Therefore, although I have spoken on this topic on other occasions I will speak of it here again so that you will proceed very carefully in this matter. How much more is it necessary not to withdraw, through one’s own efforts, from all our good and our help, which is the sacred humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I assure those who distance themselves from this that they will not enter the last two dwelling places for if they lose the guide, who is the good Jesus, they will not find the right road. It will be quite an accomplishment if they remain safely in the earlier dwelling places.*” (*Interior Castle*, VIth Dwelling Place, § VII, 5-6)

It is the Father who calls, it is He who arouses in us the desire to respond and again it is He who carries us as we follow the path of filial Life. And all this is given freely, out of pure Love, expecting nothing in return except our poor consent to his saving initiative in Jesus Christ. Could there be anything more shocking than to suggest techniques- with all the impersonal nature this term implies – for learning how to love?

“*I have come to consider all these advantages that I had as disadvantages. Not only that, but I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place*

⁴ THERESE DE L’ENFANT JESUS ET DE LA SAINTE FACE, *Manuscrit Autobiographique C*, folio 25 r, *Oeuvres complètes*, Cerf/DDB, Paris, 1992, p. 268

⁵ H. URS VON BALTHASAR, *Nouveaux points de repère*, op.cit.

in him. I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, the perfection that comes from the Law, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ, and is from God and based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have become perfect yet: I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Jesus Christ captured me. All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come; I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus.” (Ph 3, 7-11).

This evaluation does not claim to be exhaustive: it simply wants to emphasise how much the new religious paradigm – for that is certainly what it is – is far removed from the former one, that is the Christian concept of God, of man and the destiny of the world.

One of the big challenges that we have to take up as Christians now, at the beginning of the third millennium, is to preserve the purity and integrity of divine Revelation so that every person in our times can always have access to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

We should not be anxious about this: the Spirit is watching over the Bride of Christ; but being serene with regard to the future does not mean that we will therefore be passive witnesses to changes in people’s outlook, without making the indispensable effort to inculturate our faith.

Evangelising the culture implies inculturating the Gospel: that is, making a constant effort to proclaim Christ’s message in a way that its uniqueness will be seen by our contemporaries. This implies a redefinition today of the language that we use, in order to avoid all confusion due to the fact that the new religious groups have taken over some Christian terms in order to have a wider appeal.

It is a difficult but gratifying task because it allows us to rediscover with renewed wonder and deeper joy, the beauty of the message.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us to utter the words that will lead people to the Word, so that our Lord, Jesus Christ, may continue his redeeming work in the hearts of those who seek him in uprightness of heart.

Father Joseph-Marie Verlinde
Congregation of St. Joseph

APPOINTMENTS

News from the Provinces

Appointments

PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA: Sister Aster ZEWDIE was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 19th December 2007.

PROVINCE OF MADAGASCAR: Sister Madeleine HAOVASOA was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 19th December 2007.

PROVINCE OF CHILI: Sister Julia Moreno MARTINEZ was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Maria Isabel Ruiz Ruiz, 20th February 2008.

PROVINCE OF GREAT BRITIAN: Sister Marie RAW was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Sarah KING-TURNER 9th April 2008.

PROVINCE OF ALBANY: Sister Kathleen APPLER was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Mary Francis MARTIN, 2nd May 2008.

PROVINCE OF LOS ALTOS HILLS: Sister Marjory BAEZ was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Margaret KEAVENEY, 29th May 2008.

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PROVINCE OF BARCELONA: Father José Ignacio CAAMANO DOMINGUEZ was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 15th October 2007.

PROVINCE OF CHILI: Father Luis Fernando MACIAS FERNANDEZ was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity 28th November 2007.

PROVINCE OF ERITREA: Father Rufael MEHARI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 29th November 2007.

PROVINCE OF HAITI: Father Stanislaw SZCZEPANIK was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for one year, 18th January 2008.

PROVINCE OF EMMITSBURG: Father Joseph DALY was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for one year, 20th February 2008, and Father John TIMLIN was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity beginning in 2009.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AFRICA: Father David SARMIENTO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 20th February 2008.

PROVINCE OF RECIFE: Father Carlos César GONCALVES DE OLIVEIRA was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 20th February 2008.

PROVINCE OF SLOVENIA: Father Joze ZUPANCIC was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for one year, 20th February 2008, and Father Rok GAJSEK was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity beginning in 2009.

PROVINCE OF PORTUGAL: Father José Maria PEREIRA was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 20th February 2008.

PROVINCE OF THAILAND: Father Danilo ABOGADO was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 1st April 2008.

PROVINCE OF PUERTO RICO: Father Stanislaw SZCZEPANIK was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 9th April 2008.

PROVINCE OF SLOVAKIA: Father Stanislav ZONTAK was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 22nd May 2008.

PROVINCE OF HUNGARY: Father Victor KUNAY was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 18th June 2008.

Visit by Superiors

Sister Évelyne Franc, Superioress General
and Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General

Visit to the Province of Ireland 14th-15th March 2008

On **14th March 2008** St. Louise's Comprehensive College in Belfast (Northern Ireland) celebrated its 50th anniversary. Sister Évelyne graciously accepted the invitation from Mrs. Carmel McCarran, the first lay Principal, to be Guest of Honour and was accompanied by Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General and Sister Catherine Prendergast, Provincial. During the short visit to the school Sister Évelyne was warmly welcomed and entertained by talented musicians, singers and dancers.

This was followed by Mass in the Cathedral celebrated by the Bishop of Down and Connor, Bishop Patrick Walsh. At the end of the liturgy Sister Évelyne had an opportunity to speak to representatives of the student body, staff and invited guests. She paid tribute to the staff of St. Louise's who over the traumatic years in Belfast have been dedicated to the total well being of the students. Referring to the contribution of the Sisters and the Vincentian ethos of service, Sister Évelyne spoke of how proud the Company is to be associated with the College. Looking to the future she prayed *'May St. Louise's continue to give its students two priceless gifts – roots and wings. Roots in the community, culture and faith, and wings to fly into society and bring to others the joy and hope that is in their hearts.'*

Later Sisters Évelyne, Margaret and Catherine joined the governors, staff, past pupils, Sisters from many parts of Ireland, friends and associates of the College for lunch. This was another opportunity for people to make personal contact with the 55th Successor of St. Louise, the patroness of the College.

On the journey to and from the Cathedral the Sisters were given a brief tour of the area (where the Sisters first came in 1900) and which suffered greatly during the years of political turmoil and violence.

In the afternoon they met staff and residents in both Moyard Hostel and Gráinne House where the Sisters work with families who are temporarily homeless.

Before returning to Glen Road they visited Stella Maris Hostel for homeless alcoholics which is run by the “DePaul Trust”. Sister Evelyne spoke briefly to the staff and some of the residents.

The visit to Belfast ended at 4.30pm with the Sisters meeting some of the Sisters who had travelled from other houses to share the celebration and who had gathered in Glen Road to wave them off on their journey to the Marian Shrine at Knock, Co Mayo on the west coast of Ireland.

At about 9 p.m. Sister Evelyne, Sister Margaret and Sister Catherine arrived at **St. Mary’s , Knock** and were welcomed by 80 Daughters of Charity and Fr. Eamon Flanagan, their Provincial Director. They all sang a resounding “Cead mile failte” which translated means “A hundred thousand welcomes.” In her welcoming address, Sr. Elma Hurley, the Sister Servant of the Knock community, pointed out that the visit coincided with the feasts of Saint Joseph, St. Louise and St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland.

The following morning, Monsignor Quinn, Shrine Director, accompanied Sr. Evelyne, Sr. Margaret and Sr. Catherine around the Shrine complex, including the Church of St John the Baptist where the apparition took place, the Apparition Chapel, Basilica, the recently constructed Reconciliation Chapel and the rebuilt Blessed Sacrament Chapel, the centres for pastoral work, the hostel for pilgrims and the sick, the museum...

PHOTO

History of the Sanctuary of Knock.

At about 8p.m. on Thursday, 21st August 1879, a vision appeared on the south gable end of the Church of St. John the Baptist. 15 people between the ages of 6 and 75 and including men, women and children, all gazed on the apparition as they recited the rosary in the pouring rain. All these witnesses had a clear view of the Virgin Mary who was dressed all in white, with a rose on her brow and a shining crown on her head. St. Joseph was standing on the right and St. John on the left. Behind them, on a plain, unadorned altar, appeared a cross and the Lamb of God surrounded by angels.

For the people in this part of Ireland who were experiencing poverty and famine and where unemployment, dispossession and emigration were a daily reality, this apparition signified hope, consolation and strength in times of adversity. Since that time Knock has become an important place of worship and pilgrimage, a “privileged” spot where people find God.

The number of pilgrims increased steadily and today Knock attracts more than a million pilgrims each year. In 1979 John Paul II came on pilgrimage to Knock to celebrate the centenary of the apparition. This visit from the Pope confirmed the sacred character of this holy place which has become one of the most important Marian shrines in the world. The Daughters of Charity have been working there for 70 years.

After visiting these places, Sister Evelyne, Sister Margaret, Sister Catherine and all the Sisters attended Mass in honour of St. Louise. This was held in the Apparition Chapel and was presided over by Archbishop Michael Neary, archbishop of Tuam. Fr. Flanagan, Monsignor Quinn, Fr. Gibbons and three other Vincentian priests concelebrated. At the beginning of Mass, Archbishop Neary spoke of the strong links between the Shrine at Knock and the Chapel in rue du Bac. When Mass was over, two Senior Sisters from the shrine at Knock received the papal Benemerenti medal from Archbishop Neary and Monsignor Quinn. They have both given many years of service to pastoral work at the shrine and to welcoming pilgrims. Monsignor Quinn then invited Sister Evelyne and Sister Margaret to come to the altar where His Grace, Archbishop Neary, presented each of them with a special medal commemorating the Apparition.

PHOTO

In the afternoon, Sister Evelyne addressed all the Sisters who had gathered at Knock. In her talk she spoke about hope and the future, community living and the total gift we make of ourselves to God and to others. As a way of preparing for Holy Week, she called on us to deepen our relationship with Christ who gave himself completely, and to imitate Mary who was utterly open to doing God's Will.

In the evening Sister Evelyne left for Shannon airport for her flight back to Paris.

We thank God for the honour and privilege of this visit and we ask His blessing on the whole Company.

Sisters Rosaleen MacMahon and Elma Hurley
Daughters of Charity



Community of St Mary's, Knock with Sr Evelyne, Sr Margaret, Sr Catherine, Archbishop Neary and Monsignor Quinn



TESTIMONIES GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Province of Amazonia, Brazil

5th Interprovincial Gathering for Vincentian Vocation Ministry

April 1st-5th, 2008

From April 1st to April 5th, 2008, those serving in Vincentian Vocation Ministry for the Provinces of the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission in Brazil gathered in Belém – Pará (a region in the north of the country). Sixty Sisters, Vincentian Priests and Seminarians participated in this fifth interprovincial gathering. The theme of the gathering: ***“Disciples and missionaries in the service of life”*** was accompanied by the motto: *“After the example of Jesus, let us be more attentive to new challenges.”*

Throughout the course of these days together, 4 speakers developed this theme, with emphasis on our responsibility as Vincentians to invite young people to follow Jesus Christ and to accompany them on this journey of faith and service. This calls for a certain proximity with young people in order to accompany them with a spirit of welcoming and listening, with sufficient affective maturity, an understanding of the realities that young people face, and a capacity to address the challenges of today’s world. These qualities of accompaniment are necessary in order to reanimate our Vincentian vocation ministry.

The sense of camaraderie that existed among us and our sharing of experiences during this gathering, carry the promise that our vocation ministry in the future will bear abundant fruit. After studying our shared experiences, we have chosen several lines of action for the next three years in order to revitalise our service of vocation animation:

1 - Formation

Objective:

Intensify formation in the Vincentian charism for those who accompany young people and develop their understanding of the diverse realities experienced by young people, especially in the cities.

Methods :

- Offer opportunities to deepen their understanding of human formation, spirituality, and current topics, etc.
- Work in association with various services and movements in the Church.

2 – Mission

Objective:

Be aware of our missionary responsibility.

Methods:

- Participate in service activities with young people in a variety of areas where poverty exists (schools, families, parishes, popular missions, etc.)
- Organise times and places where we can gather to witness to the way we live our charism.

3 – Methodology

Objective:

Put into practice the methodology proposed by the 2nd Congress for Vocation Ministry in Brazil.

Methods:

- Insert ourselves in the realities of young people in order to become closer to them and to learn how to witness our charism to them.
- Serve in catechesis and evangelisation with the aim of vocational discernment.

The meeting concluded with a very festive celebration of Eucharist. In the footsteps of the disciples at Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) we were invited to set out on mission in our service of Vincentian vocation animation with 5 points of focus:

- ***Set out on the journey:*** *as pilgrims, itinerant, going out of ourselves*
- ***Meet young people:*** *be in contact with them, learn with them, help guide them on the journey*
- ***Accept the invitation:*** *“stay with us”*
- ***Celebrate:*** *promote times of sharing the bread, life, struggles, joys and hopes of young people*
- ***Go out on mission:*** *to proclaim: “The Lord is alive! He is with us.”*

At the end of the Mass, the members of the Provinces of Brazil were sent forth under the protection of Mary, Queen of Amazonia.

Then, after words of gratitude offered by several participants, Sister Maria Cristina Cardoso da Silva, Visitatrix of the Province of Amazonia, thanked all those who contributed to the organization and realization of the gathering and asked the Blessed Virgin Mary, only Mother of the Company, to continue to guide each person in his or her vocation.

Sisters Anagilsa SAMPAIO BENTES, Cecília SÁ MIRANDA, Maria Rejjane DA MATA
DIAS
Daughters of Charity

Sisters' Testimonies

Province of Cali (Colombia)

Formation courses for parents of handicapped children to train them to become “co-therapists.”

Introduction

For several years now, a Centre for **Integral reeducation** at the Provincial House of Cali (Colombia), has been offering training courses for the parents of handicapped children with a view to helping them become co-therapists for their child.

THE PROBLEM OF HANDICAP IN THE WORLD

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that there are more than 500 million handicapped people throughout the world and they make up 10% of the world's population. In countries where there is conflict the number could reach 18%.

In Colombia, the census carried out in 2005 revealed that 6.5% out of a population of 41 million inhabitants are handicapped and that there are important differences between the different regions. Cali, the 3rd largest town in the country, has 17,000 handicapped people out of a total population of 2,300,000 inhabitants. Among these, 6000 have already received government aid through programmes of prevention and retraining.

The Daughters of Charity are committed to working in this situation affecting the Province of Cali: they are responsible for helping 30 handicapped people in their own homes (with the help of the Liliana Fund) and a further 80 people at the Centre for Integral Retraining in the Provincial House.

THE CENTRE FOR INTEGRAL RETRAINING AT THE PROVINCIAL HOUSE IN CALI

This Centre develops therapies to respond in an integral way to people's needs. It's aim is to form parents (often from single families) so that they can become co-therapists for their handicapped child by learning adapted techniques and taking part in the development of their child's independence by helping him or her to relate to the family and those around them.

This Centre is particularly concerned with neurological development. It takes in boys and girls between the ages of 1 and 12 whose handicap is of neurological origin: Downs syndrome, neurological deterioration, developmental problems, learning difficulties etc. Care services include physiotherapy, speech- audiology, occupational therapy, the psychology of special education, art therapy.....

In the area of psychology, attention is focused on helping the parents to be emotionally balanced. Art therapy is an important means for restoring a child's emotional well-being. Professionals, volunteer workers (Vincentian Volunteers from the AIC), Sisters and parents are invited to make sure that information is better shared and that they have good relationships with one another. Children discover that they have abilities not previously recognised and they become more and more independent. They learn good habits of personal hygiene, good eating habits and the ability to integrate at school. With their parents they take part creatively and enthusiastically in the different activities at the Centre. It gives us great joy to hear the parents say, *"Here we have found new hope, we no longer feel that we have to bear on our own the responsibility of being parent."*

Training courses for handicapped children

A neural-developmental programme is targeted specifically at children under 6 years of age who have neurological problems. The aim here is to achieve a better balance in the sensory development of the child and this should be appropriate for his age, and give him a greater measure of independence. The parents are invited to take part in these formation sessions organised by the therapists.

Another formation programme is specifically aimed at children between the ages of 6 and 10 who have learning difficulties. They are sent to the Centre by schools in problem areas.

Evaluation of the formation

As a follow-up to these formation programmes and as a way of assessing their value, a Sister-Coordinator discusses with the different partners involved in the projects and she gives advice about the different stages to be followed.

This evaluation takes into account the experience of professionals, Vincentian Volunteers and the Sisters

Conclusion

This service is a commitment made on behalf of the most vulnerable and we want to play our part in guaranteeing them a decent standard of living. In this service we strive to convey to them the tenderness of Christ, to pass on to them the Vincentian charism and to work as a team so that we can all be agents in the human and spiritual development of handicapped children.

Sister Lucia Gomez OVIEDO
Echoes correspondent

MESSAGE FROM A MUSLIM BROTHER

Province of Switzerland - Turkey

A Precious Sacrifice

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.” (Ps 116:15)

On Sunday, June 3rd 2007, Father Ragheed Ganni and three subdeacons were killed as they were leaving the Chaldean Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul after Mass. The news has provoked deep sadness, indignation and bitterness. Father Ganni was a very young priest who had recently returned from Rome after his studies and ordination, someone who was already greatly appreciated and admired by those who knew him. The tragedies occurring in Iraq are enormous, but each case is quite unique, and the story of this young priest is quite edifying. Back in his own country, he was just beginning a successful ministry which could have continued for many years; but events took another turn. It is already obvious, though, that his death has not been in vain, as it evokes reactions from people beyond those of the Christian community. This poignant letter written by one of his Muslim friends testifies to this. Their friendship developed while Father Ganni was studying in Rome, and despite their religious differences, the author grasped the depth of his friend’s spiritual life.

Letter from a Muslim brother and friend

Ragheed, my brother,

I ask your forgiveness for not being with you when those criminals opened fire against you and your brothers. The bullets that have gone through your pure and innocent body have also gone through my heart and soul.

You were one of the first people I met when I arrived to Rome. We met in the halls of the Angelicum and we would drink our cappuccino in the university's cafeteria. You impressed me with your innocence, joy, your pure and tender smile that never left you. I always picture you smiling, joyful and full of zest for life. Ragheed is to me innocence personified; a wise innocence that carries in its heart the sorrows of his unhappy people. I remember the time, in the university's dining room, when Iraq was under embargo and you told me that the price of a single cappuccino would have

satisfied the needs of an Iraqi family for a whole day. You told me this as if you were feeling guilty for being far away from your persecuted people and unable to share in their sufferings ... In fact, you returned to Iraq, not only to share the suffering and destiny of your people but also to join your blood to the blood of thousands of Iraqis killed each day. I will never forget the day of your ordination at the Urbanian University ... with tears in your eyes, you told me: "Today, I have died to self" ... a hard thing to say.

I didn't understand it right away, or maybe I didn't take it as seriously as I should have. ... But today, through your martyrdom, I have understood that phrase. ... You have died in your soul and body to be raised up in your beloved, in your teacher, and so that Christ would be raised up in you, despite the sufferings, sorrows, despite the chaos and madness.

In the name of what god of death have they killed you? In the name of which paganism have they crucified you? Did they truly know what they were doing?

O God, we don't ask you for revenge or retaliation. We ask you for victory, a victory of justice over falsehood, life over death, innocence over treachery, blood over the sword. ... Your blood will not have been shed in vain, dear Ragheed, because with it you have blessed the soil of your country. And from heaven, your tender smile will continue to light the darkness of our nights and announce to us a better tomorrow.

I ask your forgiveness, brother, for when the living get together they think they have all the time in the world to talk, visit, and share feelings and thoughts. You had invited me to Iraq ... I dreamed of that visit, of visiting your house, your parents, your office. ... It never occurred to me that it would be your tomb that one day I would visit or that it would be verses from my Quran that I would recite for the repose of your soul ...

One day, before your first trip to Iraq after a prolonged absence, I went with you to buy souvenirs and presents for your family. You spoke with me of your future work: "*I would like to preside over the people on the base of charity before justice,*" you said. It was difficult for me to imagine you a "canonical judge" ... And today your blood and your martyrdom have spoken for you, a verdict of fidelity and patience, of hope against all suffering, of survival, in spite of death, in spite of everything.

Brother, your blood hasn't been shed in vain, and your church's altar wasn't a masquerade. ... You assumed your role very seriously until the end, with a smile that would never be extinguished ... ever.

Your loving brother,

Adnan MAKRANI
*Professor of Islamic Studies in the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture,
Pontifical Gregorian University – Rome*

Excerpt from the journal "Presence" (Catholic Church in Turkey)

SPECIAL CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF MOTHER GUILLEMIN

Mother Suzanne Guillemin

1906 – 1968

Daughter of Charity – Daughter of the Church
Superioress General of the Company

**IX – MOTHER GUILLEMIN: FROM WORDS TO
ACTIONS**

Sister Guillemin's love for God found its true meaning in her gift of self for the service of God in the person of the poor.

Cardinal Garonne, in his book *Religious Women Today: Yes, But...* devotes several pages to the amazing personality of Mother Guillemin. The lines that follow can motivate the way that we, as members of the Company, live for God and for those who are poor.

“She is not a canonised saint...but she has become a familiar figure to many. Whether it was a question of being called to play a major role in a Congress, or of working with the highest authorities of the Church, something that her knowledge and expertise naturally destined her to do, as in the case of the Council...we got used to coming across this witness, to listening to her, even admiring her, to using her expertise, and celebrating her amazing and courageous broadmindedness.

An important lesson can be drawn from the example of this daughter of Saint Vincent, merely by seeing the way she lived, listening to her speak as someone who entered fully into whatever she was called to say or do, and obviously, completely committed to her Lord. Mother Guillemin also offers us, in her rare form of simple clarity with regard to facts, the proof that the essence of religious life is to accept without a second thought the most novel and disconcerting realities, those of the current conditions of our world. Witnessing to what some people would regard as the past ... she demanded, in the name of fidelity to this, the most astounding changes of outlook vis a vis the world.”

Mother Guillemin said: *“The extraordinary evolution of the world, is profoundly transforming the sociological and ecclesial context in which congregations are inserted. If the woman religious wants to keep faith with the world, with Christ, with the Church and consequently with her Founders, she is invited to move from*

- *a position of possession to a position of insertion;*
- *a position of authority to a position of collaboration;*
- *a sense of religious superiority to a sense of fraternity;*
- *a sense of human inferiority to a genuine participation in life;*

- a preoccupation with moral conversion to a concern for the mission. We must be convinced that if we do not accept this reconversion, we will be out of step with the Church and with the world and will suffer the consequences.

The world, especially the world of poor persons, was one of Mother Guillemin's chief concerns: "*Consider your vocation*" (January 1st, 1965) she said, and she backed up her words with actions: "*The servant of those who are poor needs formation, not only in the technical sense, but also to learn how to encounter her God, and even to 'leave God for God.'*"

SAINT JOSEPH'S CHAPEL (1967)

On the spiritual level, it was the Vatican Council that had led the way. In the Motherhouse, the issue of places for prayer presented itself. More and more, pilgrims were asking for access to the chapel. An additional place for recollection and celebration of prayer was needed. The Saint Joseph workroom, known as "the shop" paid the price for this need. The work of transforming it took several months. Stone archways created simple lines, and the altar, placed in the centre, was an unadorned table made of green marble. On May 8th 1967, Father Slattery came to bless the chapel and celebrate the first Mass, with Father Duvaltier, the Director of the Province of Paris, who gave the homily.

THE OFFICE OF LAUDS (JANUARY 1ST, 1966)

To Mother Guillemin's great joy, the Sisters in the Motherhouse would participate in the prayer of the Church **together** for the first time.

Father Jamet helped the Sisters to understand and become familiar with the presentation of the book of the Liturgy of the Hours. The office of Lauds is the expression of the prayer of the Church: an office of praise which, like the Church's faith, is rooted in the Word of Christ. In the midst of its human circumstances, the Church contemplates the marvellous works of God, gives voice to them in proclaiming the Word and celebrates them in the liturgical mystery. Father Jamet reiterated: "*In Christ, it is humanity today who sings its joy, expresses its suffering, seeks and listens.*"

This is a privileged way of encountering God in our present realities and sharing our responsibility for the contemporary world.

The Sisters were thrilled with these changes requested by the Council. It was a huge step forward in the spiritual life even if the task was challenging: becoming familiar with the liturgy of each day, learning the hymns and chants, finding the pages, and above all, seeing the psalms in their religious context.

RADIO MONTE CARLO (1967)

Mother Guillemin was invited to give an interview about the Community on Radio Monte Carlo. Bishop Rupp of Monaco introduced her to the listeners like this: "*I do not know of a more complete way of symbolising the Gospel than the Daughters*

of Charity... they are always at work, in prayer, with devotion and in silence." He then asked the following questions:¹

1 – May I ask you first to recall for us the origin of the Little Company?

Mother Guillemin responded with her customary simplicity; then she was asked: In what respect have the Daughters of Charity differed, from the very beginning, and even at the present time, from Religious on the one hand, (this title being used in its traditional sense), and on the other, from recently established societies of consecrated secular women?

2 – Would you please indicate how the Company is governed, and what difficulties arise from the changes in ways of thinking?

3 – How was the process of changing the habit carried out? Can you name the individual Sisters who have demonstrated the holiness of the Company?

4 – What do you consider most opportune in the general aggiornamento of religious life, and what, if any, are the adaptations foreseen with regard to the Daughters of Charity?

5 – Is the role of women in the Church developing and becoming personalised in the light of Vatican II?

6 – What do you consider as most important for Christians in general, in the updating of the universal Church?

In conclusion, Bishop Rupp asked Mother Guillemin to leave the audience with some thoughts of Saint Vincent on which they might meditate. Here is her response: "*Saint Vincent, when speaking to his Missioners, always insisted upon Charity, an apostolic Charity, a universal Charity. It seems to me that in these post-Conciliar days, we could meditate upon the word he said just before dying, that is, at the moment when his holiness was fully developed: 'It is true, my brothers, that I am sent not only to love God but to make Him loved. It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbour does not also love Him.'*"

MATERIAL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE MOTHERHOUSE

The Motherhouse benefited enormously from the organisational talents of Mother Guillemin. She reorganised the various services and regrouped them: the Secretariat and the Economat were equipped with individual offices and equipment needed for their work. The linen room was placed on the same floor as the habit room, the pharmacy relocated closer to the infirmary.

Other important renovations were under way: the kitchen, bedrooms for the elderly Sisters, parlours set up adjacent to the Mission courtyard. The retreat room was redesigned to provide simultaneous translation, and other improvements were made.

All the floors of the Seminary building were remodelled to include classrooms, dormitory cubicles and community rooms. The garden itself changed in appearance with garages replacing the henhouses and a basketball court for the Seminary Sisters next to the "rond".

¹ Radio Monte-Carlo, 15th October 1967: the replies to these questions can be found in the December Echoes 1967

The entire organisation of the “Roman residence” in Rome was the work of Mother Guillemin. L’Hay-les-Roses, the site of the second stage of Postulancy, was also the object of her reflections. At Fain-les-Moutiers, the restoration of the birthplace of Saint Catherine brought joy to all Daughters of Charity.

SISTER SAUVAGE AT THE VATICAN (1967)

At the request of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, a Daughter of Charity and three other religious women were appointed to serve in this dicastery of the Roman Curia. Sister Sauvage, the Sister Servant at the House of Charity in Paris on rue Championnet and directress of the school, was named for this service, a ministry that Saint Vincent never would have imagined. Mother Guillemin had the happiness of introducing Sister Sauvage to the Sacred Congregation of Religious, who had decided, with the approbation of the Sovereign Pontiff and after consultation with the International Union of Superiors of Religious Congregations, to admit among its members four religious women representing different languages, communities and nationalities. They were:

- for the German language, a member of the Sisters of the Divine Saviour,
- for the English language, a religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary,
- for the Spanish language, a member of the Religious of Jesus and Mary,
- for the French language, a Daughter of Charity.

What would they do? It is difficult to sum it up concisely. First of all, they needed to familiarise themselves with the Italian language to be able to focus their study on the particular issues of religious life for women. For several years, Sister Sauvage was a member of the Commission of Canon Law.

TWO INITIATIVES: PEDAGOGICAL COMMISSION AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WORKS

PEDAGOGICAL COMMISSIONS

The Debré law concerning teaching in France had recently been voted upon. Two Sisters of the Centrale des Oeuvres were asked to study the requirements relating to our various educational establishments: primary teaching with its extensions of complementary courses, secondary education and technical schools. The law proposed different contracts. What should be done? How should choices be made?

The Sisters who were directresses of the schools were asking for help. It was decided, with the Visitatrices of the Provinces in France, to develop a study commission comprising two Sisters from each Province to reflect together on the new issues, in order to respect the charism of the Company.

At the first meeting of the Commission for Technical Education, Mother Guillemin described its purpose: *“The idea for this Pedagogical Commission came from observations we have made about advances in our technical education programme throughout our Provinces. Some subjects or disciplines are very thoroughly studied in certain regions, while in others, sources and insights are*

haphazard...there is no uniform standard among the technical schools, and such a standard needs to be established. We have made the following reflections:

1 – When a person receives a vocation from God to live in community, it is not enough to strive for personal perfection by fulfilling the duty of one's state, or to strive for spiritual perfection, a perfection which is the special characteristic of religious life. There are other points to be addressed:

a) consecration through vows, which others besides us also practise

b) life in community: I believe that educational meetings such as the one we are going to have are a manifestation of this.

In contemplating the splendours of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres, we can reflect on the idea that among those who built the cathedral, there were certain individuals who had greater responsibility than others for the beauty and magnificence of this edifice, as well as for its durability. There were architects, artistic geniuses, etc. And our dear Brother Ricardien explained that in the Middle Ages, the life of the community and that of the Church had a greater role than in our day. There were supervisors, geniuses, scientists who took the measurements, who developed the plans...these geniuses are always overlooked because they are lost in the masses of the faithful, and they are the ones who brought about these wonderful advances. These architects, master glassworkers and sculptors achieved their merit due to the people who supported them...To return to the topic at hand, we need to admit that each of us is called to contribute our individual part to bring to perfection the whole range of the work given to us within the Community and the Church in France. We need to draw support from the Community because each one of us has the right to expect insight and support that we would not otherwise have on our own. But we must also admit: if I have not personally contributed the insight, potential and knowledge that God has given to me to the overall community in the Company and in the Church, I have not fulfilled my duty. This is the way we can live out this motto: "to be an advancement of the Community in general through each of us as individuals."

Sister Guillemin followed the work of the Commission not only with interest but also in a way that was both down-to-earth and spiritual, in order to respond to the most concrete issues that arose.

The Commission for Technical Education consisting of 12 members serving for a period of three years, met twice a year. The Commission's goal was to:

- Work together on programmes and modifications required by the National Educational Organisation according to subject matter.
- Promote the role of the teaching staff.
- Prepare formation sessions according to the needs: Sister Directresses, Teaching Sisters and mixed sessions of laity and Sisters.
- Share pedagogical experiences.
- Develop projects.

The synthesis, after being approved by the authorities, was sent to the Visitatrices.

Each meeting set aside time in its programme for a conference on doctrine or on applied pedagogy. Ten years later, these regularly held gatherings reached the General Council of Education in Rome, creating an International Council that gained widespread acceptance among other congregations.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WORKS

In one of her many conferences, Sister Guillemain spoke as follows: *“with regard to our works, it is only through continual interaction with the Superioress General by means of the Centrale des Oeuvres and a concerted and unified action, that valid results will be achieved. A whole network of relationships, links and information exchange must be established...”*

With this concept of communication, it seemed to Sister Guillemain essential that a National Council for the Works be established, comprising the Superioress General, the six Visitatrices, the Superior of the Centrale des Oeuvres, the Superior General and a Vincentian in charge of the Works.

In its thinking and aspirations this National Council would need to be supported by the technical councils of each branch of the works: hospitals, social services, home health care, children’s homes, primary schools, technical and rural schools, children and youth services. The Council met three times a year.

With hindsight and through the process of evaluation, it can be said that this was a necessary tool for providing information to Superiors and supporting deliberations that came out of it, in order to remain within the parameters of our vocation.

APPENDIX

MOTHER GUILLEMIN: HER WRITTEN AND SPOKEN INSTRUCTIONS

Through the Company’s history, the importance of the writings of Superiors has never diminished. They are a source of strength in living out our vocation. From Sister Mathurine Guerin to our own day, the circular letters of January 1st and February 2nd provide spiritual nourishment for the Sisters. Other writings draw the Sisters’ attention to particular events or ways of acting, placing emphasis, sometimes in a robust way, on the goals to be reached.

Forty years ago, Mother Guillemain did not have access to texts from the earliest days of the Company in the same way that we have the joy of reading them today, contemplating them and meditating on them. Her spiritual insights join those of Sister Mathurine Guerin with regard to the Sister Servants’ ways of acting. In a brief conference given after her death, Father Jamet, the Director General, said this: *“There is no better way to demonstrate the Christian prudence with which our Sister governed the Company than by the holy advice that she wrote and that she safeguarded and followed ceaselessly. She knew that the one who follows this advice must:*

1 – Live in such a way that nothing blameworthy is to be found in her, so that she may serve in some way as a model for others. In this way, all those under her

guidance may see that she is the first to practise what she prescribes or recommends to others.

2 – Pay careful attention to the mental and physical capacities of each person in order to guide them to perfection in the way most appropriate for them, as all are not led along the same pathway. To do this, she must often ask God to guide them himself and to protect them from the influence of nature which often spoils the actions of grace.

3 – Be very vigilant about providing for or meeting the needs of everyone, both corporally and spiritually.

4 – Have the same love for all, accompanied by gentleness in order to bear with others' faults and expect imperfections, showing steadfastness in her encounters with others.

5 – Do everything possible to win hearts for without this it is difficult to get the best out of people.

6 – Take special care of those who are timid and those who are resistant to her.

7 – Do everything possible to help the Sisters develop solid virtues, without being distracted by aversions based on nature, nor being discouraged by people's failings, but always faithfully carrying out her responsibilities.

8 – Console the afflicted, listen to all complaints without letting herself be prejudiced by any negative feelings about others; instead, to suspend judgment.

9 – Never warn others in a state of anger nor as a means of reproach, but make use of reprimands charitably. If she finds herself using strong words in an admonition she should moderate them and always end with some words of encouragement..."

When we reread the instructions of Mother Guillemin to the Sister Servants, we encounter Sister Mathurine: *"understand matters, present principles, hold firm and then, afterwards, know how to take circumstances into account; not only tolerating them, but accepting them and taking them on."*

"Rootedness in the faith, in union with the universal Church, must be our guide on the pathway of charity." Her last circular letter of January 1st, "May God rekindle in us the fire of our faith" began with an exhortation from the Apostle Paul: *"Examine yourselves, see if you have faith!"* (Cor. 13:5).

All her teaching, written or spoken, was imbued with a solid doctrinal understanding of the Church, adapted to the life of the Daughters of Charity. It emphasised the essential duty of "imitating Christ." In addition to her official circular letters, we should mention the repetitions of prayer given during retreats at the Motherhouse. The repetition of prayer in preparation for Christmas and Renovation were truly spiritual notes corresponding to the liturgical season.

There was no limit to what she said and wrote to help us better understand Vatican Council! Updating the Common Rules, verifying age-old traditions and adapting or discarding them. But always: **God is all; God is in the event!**

MOTHER GUILLEMIN AND HER COLLABORATORS IN FORMATION (PRIESTS OF THE MISSION AND OTHERS): *“Come to the fountain of living water”* (Jer. 2:13)

Father William M. Slattery

There is no doubt today that the Superior General of that time, Father William M. Slattery, through the holiness of his life, was the most distinguished collaborator in the life of Mother Guillemin, even before her Generalate began.

In all the sessions that took place at Ballainvilliers, Father Slattery gave a conference on a topic of his choice in line with that of the session. At the time of Mother Guillemin's death the letter he wrote to all the Sisters testified to their effective collaboration and his appreciation of her life totally given to God.

“I write this letter to assure you that we are all very united in this great sacrifice which our Loving God in His Infinite Wisdom and Goodness has asked of us in calling to her eternal reward on March 28th, our Most Honoured Mother Guillemin who was so esteemed and so loved... We have admired her noble virtues, both natural and supernatural, and her exceptional gifts of mind and heart. Her faith was living, ardent and profound. Her trust in Divine Providence was made manifest on many occasions. Her love for God fully revealed itself in her words and in her works. She had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Her charity, her kindness, her goodness reached out to all, particularly to the members of the Company and the Poor.

All who approached her were struck by the radiance emanating from this great figure in the Church; they all appreciated her superior intellect. How effective was her informed interpretation of the adaptation of the Company at the present time, according to the directives of the Second Vatican Council, while at the same time guarding a prudent and supernatural solicitude to maintain the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

Everyone rejoiced that her untiring zeal in the accomplishment of her mission merited her designation by the Sovereign Pontiff as Auditrice at the Council. More recently still, the Holy See admitted her to the number of Consultors for the Sacred Congregation of Religious and gave her a place in the Pontifical Commission ‘Justice and Peace.’ Our Most Honoured Mother has, moreover, used her brilliant qualities in the preparation for your next General Assembly which is already considerably advanced. I will add to my previous remark by saying that the unforeseen death of Our Most Honored Mother in no way changes the General Assembly programme which she has organised.

What a beautiful example she has left us of a Daughter of Charity according to the heart of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise!

We cherish the touching memory of her virtues to encourage us. We have the consolation of knowing that from on high she will obtain blessings for the Church, the Double Family of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, and for the next General Assembly. We thank God for giving her to the Company as Mother General. All her life may be summed up in her last words: ‘My God, I love You with my whole being!’”

Father Felix Cantassot

Father Cantassot, who was the Assistant General at the time, was a valuable support at the time that the Centrale des Oeuvres was established. He was also the author of the commentary for the Constitutions of 1954. This work, appearing in 1967, was not implemented as Vatican Council had presented new developments.

Other Vincentians

Other Vincentians also collaborated with her in these intensive times of formation: Father Dodin, in preparing the Tercentenary celebrations, Father Duvaltier, Director of the Province of Paris, with Father Vansteenkiste for the Liturgy, Father Koch for formation on Saint Vincent for all the professional formation programmes for the Sisters, Father Allain for gatherings of the Pedagogical Commission. Other Vincentians came to help out as needed. The aggiornamento requested by the Council put into place another cycle of formation requiring competence.

Father Joseph Jamet

As Director General, Father Jamet was always present to provide spiritual assistance, especially at the time that the Constitution on the Liturgy was put into effect. Numerous articles from him published in the Echo of the Motherhouse served to inform the Sisters in other countries about the process of the Council. Preparation for the General Assembly, meditations for monthly retreats and the two books: “The Daughter of Charity in the Church and the World Today” were precious contributions for renewal. Each chapter contained teaching from Saint Vincent and Conciliar doctrine: “The Daughter of Charity is a Daughter of God and Daughter of the Church.”

His articles in the Echo shed light on many matters of doctrine, offered explanations for the foundational documents, new perspectives on missionary activity, the difference between the Council and the Synod which would become an ongoing institution, etc.

For Mother Guillemain, Father Jamet was a collaborator of the highest order for the Company as a whole. Attentive to events, concerned with putting into practice the demands of the Council, he did so with exactitude in fidelity to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. He helped us love the Church; his personal faith and his competence in the subject guaranteed that he would help bring about an aggiornamento that would be pleasing to our Founders.

Father Etienne Diebold

Father Diebold was actively involved in the formation work that Sister Guillemain asked him to provide for spreading the faith, as was advised by Cardinal Jean Honore, a high authority figure in the Church in France.

The Company had already benefited from the updated daily meditations according to the liturgical cycle, meditations on Scripture texts and the conferences of

Saint Vincent. Five small volumes (Advent, Christmas-Epiphany, Lent, Passion and Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost) had been offered for daily meditations, complemented by meditations for the first Saturday of the month and events particularly dear to the Daughters of Charity, especially preparation for renewal of vows, as well as certain dates related to our Founders. These books are now out of print, with some rare copies located on the shelves of the Vincentian library.

While he was Superior of the Major Seminary in Montpellier, Father Diebold had been called to the Council preparations as an “Observer” to the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians. He gladly accepted Sister Guillemin’s offer of assistance. In addition, the Canonist Jean Honore, head of the National Secretariat for Religious Education, appointed him as Director of Catechetical Sessions, with faculties to prepare the Sisters to receive a diploma as a professional catechist, a requirement at that time. In this way, for three consecutive years, the Sisters of the six Provinces of France would come for formation under the watchful eye of Father Diebold. The Council teachings had a significant place in the programme. All these preparations, as well as his contact with the Sisters, helped them deepen their understanding of the thinking of Saint Vincent in order to proclaim the faith. It led to the writing of a condensed “Catechesis in the Mission of the Daughter of Charity” which appeared in the supplement to the Echo of the Motherhouse in October 1964.

Inspired by the thinking of Saint Vincent, all the ministries of the Daughters of Charity, in particular their work in hospitals, home health care, education, care of the elderly, and residential child care were updated by Father Diebold’s work in the professional sessions entitled “The Daughter of Charity, Catechist by Vocation.”

Mother Guillemin, in her last circular letter of January 1st 1968, acknowledged this assistance that was so vital for an up to date discovery of our faith and ways to proclaim it to those who are poor: “*May our faith be like that of Saint Vincent, simple, enlightened, humble, strong, serene and active.*” She joyfully mentions various initiatives: sessions, courses, conferences in response to Sisters’ needs, noting that such efforts must be intensified, with the intention of reaching all the Sisters. After the death of Mother Guillemin, Father Diebold would continue these development sessions to help the Sisters understand the Conciliar teachings.

Brother Ricardien-Marie, De la Salle Christian Brother

All the Sisters who made a pilgrimage to Chartres with Brother Ricardien recall the enthusiasm with which he summed up the cathedral of Chartres in a single sentence. With broad sweeping gestures, he would point in succession to the doors and the large nave, saying: “*The Old Testament which prepared for the New Testament so that the Church might continue.*” He used the same sense of conviction to situate the privileged place of Mary in this marvellous history of Salvation. With his entire heart, mind and being, by gestures and the intonations of his voice, he championed what he called “the mystique of Chartres.”

Nevertheless, a personality as rich as his could not be limited to just being “Grand Knight of Our Lady of Chartres.” For 18 years, Brother Ricardien had been working with the Sisters at the Centrale des Oeuvres: he participated in formation sessions on various subjects. As well as his almost encyclopedic knowledge of many

topics, he was first of all a man of faith, and doubtless due to that, a man with a great sensitivity for all the people he met: generous in his thoughtfulness, selfless, always considering the views of those whom he was addressing, motivated by the love of God.

On the occasion of the death of Mother Guillemin, we find all these characteristics in his letter dated March 28th, 1968 addressed to the Sisters at the Centrale des Oeuvres: *“She sees, we believe. There remains one single truth, the love of our Lord. One day we too will see...More than ever, I dare say, I feel like part of the family.”* Yes, Brother Ricardien-Marie had become a member of the Vincentian family. All the sessions, international retreats, and cultural outings for the schools in France and elsewhere always included a pilgrimage to Chartres led by him.

In this context, one of the most memorable pilgrimages was the one that took place in honour of the Tercentenary of the death of the Founders. For Sister Guillemin, Chartres and Saint Louise were inseparable. Thanks to Brother Ricardien, the spiritual event of the month of October 1644 would have a significant impact: thanksgiving, act of faith, commitment. On October 16th 1960, Brother Ricardien invited all the Vincentian priests who had been given the task of leading the journey to Chartres, to meet at the Centrale des Oeuvres. The evening before, the Sister Servants also gathered to become familiar with the cathedral with the help of an audio-visual slide presentation. The speaker was of course Brother Ricardien. He emphasised first of all the Marian presence in the cathedral, *“she who is with us because the Lord is with her.”* He then made the connection between October 17th 1644 when Saint Louise presented the Little Company to Our Lady so that it might be of service to the Church, and this October 17th 1960 when this same family, gathered around its Most Honoured Mother, would consecrate itself once more to Christ through Mary, in the presence of the bishop of Chartres, in the Church. Brother Ricardien’s conclusion goes right to the heart of the matter: *“Tomorrow, the Cathedral of Chartres will be for you the setting of a grace-filled event. This cathedral is the most theological, the most Marian and the most vibrant of all our cathedrals.”* *It was the Lord’s will that the Cathedral of Chartres should be for our religious family what Rheims is for the history of France”* The concluding words of Brother’s talk evoked a new sense of fervour: *“this gathering can and must continue to be a new, ongoing time of Pentecost for the great family of Saint Louise.”*

Daughters of Charity from all over the world have been able to profit from the pilgrimages prepared and led by Brother Ricardien, where he offered his all for Mary and Saint Louise. To this day, the pilgrimage tradition continues...

Cardinal Jean Honore and Catholic Education

Without giving all the examples of Cardinal Honore’s collaboration in Daughter of Charity formation in the area of catechesis or education in Catholic schools, the following seems worth mentioning. Cardinal Honore participated in the preparation of the General Council of Education for the Daughters of Charity in Rome, entitled *“Culture and Faith in a teaching community in a pluralistic society.”* This Council was international; in addition to Sisters in teaching ministries in France, it included Sister delegates from the following Provinces: Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Congo, Egypt, Spain, Italy, Iran, Lebanon, Madagascar, Netherlands and

French-speaking Switzerland, in all, 220 Daughters of Charity. Cardinal Honore spoke on “Pluralistic Society and Catholic Education.”

The few lines that follow express clearly his ideas about the Daughter of Charity in Catholic schools at that time. In preparing his doctoral thesis, he was assisted by the chaplain of a team of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society at the school in Chartres. This allowed him to grasp clearly the mystique of our service of education: *“Can a school that takes the majority of its students from a milieu that is indifferent to God, and is even defiant, if not hostile to the Church, still claim to serve the plan of Christian education? I imagine that this question is in the thoughts of a certain number of you. First of all because frequently your schools, which are well accepted, are located in neighbourhoods without sunlight or a single tree, where the poor people so dear to your Founder are living. However, the proportion of believers seems pathetic in relation to the number of non-believers or non-practising Christians. Then again, there are the changes in schools that have resulted from the new statutes that French legislation has developed for private schools...And in fact, your schools are generally open to children from working class families; you also accept the “poorest” children, whether or not they are believers or baptised. This is proof of your fidelity to the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, since you take to heart the idea of being available to the “poor people,” those who are empty-handed and who perhaps suffer more from their spiritual poverty than from material distress...What I would like to demonstrate to you in this conference that marks the opening of your session, is that opening your schools to non-believers is not only an expression of your faithfulness to your Vincentian heritage, but also an apostolic requirement for Catholic schools in the Church today.”*²

IN MEMORIA...

In her circular letter of February 2nd 1968, Mother Guillemin included the following lines: *“...When the Lord created us, He endowed each one of us with powers enabling us to act, and with time in which to use those powers. Later on God asked us to devote these endowments to His own particular use...”*

ON |MARCH 28TH 1968, THE LORD CALLED HER TO HIMSELF

The texts that appeared in the Echo spoke mostly of what she “did” on all levels; speaking of what she “was” proved to be a more delicate matter. Others were given an understanding of her that was very extensive and of unsuspected depth. It is with these considerations in mind that we confirm the presentation of **Mother Guillemin, Daughter of Charity, Daughter of the Church.**

Condolences arrived from every continent, most especially from the Church: *“This is truly a loss for the entire Church”* said Cardinal Martin.

THE HOLY FATHER AND THE VATICAN

² Acts from the Council of Education: in the Archives of the Company

His Holiness Pope Paul VI sent to the family of the deceased as well as to the Daughters of Charity his apostolic blessing in a telegram with the following text: “HIS HOLINESS, GREATLY AFFECTED SUDDEN DEATH REVEREND MOTHER SUZANNE GUILLEMIN, DISTINGUISHED AUDITRICE OF COUNCIL, RAISES TOWARDS GOD FERVENT PRAYERS FOR REPOSE SOUL YOUR SUPERIORESS GENERAL GREATLY MOURNED AND ACCORD HEART-FELT FATHERLY APOSTOLIC BLESSING, FAMILY, DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, PLEDGE OF DIVINE COMFORT PAINFUL LOSS.”

Following this, the heads of the Church Dicasteries never stopped singing her praises: Cardinal Antonutti, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, Cardinal Pericle Felici shared greatly in the suffering of the Daughters of Charity faced with “*the loss of the shining figure of Mother Guillemin.*”

Telegrams arrived from Cardinal Masella, Cardinal Agagianian, Cardinal Villot, Cardinal Felin, Cardinal Martin, Cardinal Carpino, Cardinal Suenens and the Deputy for the Secretary of State, Bishop Benelli.

The Ambassador of France for the Holy See, M. Brouillet, wrote: “*I was deeply disturbed by news of the loss that has so cruelly and suddenly struck your Congregation, and with it, **our country and the entire Church** in the venerated and admired person of Very Reverend Mother Suzanne Guillemin...*”

Those who were with her in the Council sent long letters. Father Greco, SJ, who was in the same tribunal as her during the Council wrote: “*As an expert, I was able to appreciate the breadth of her views, her serenity, and her marvellous equilibrium. There was a sense of ‘solidness’ about her. Her great openness, her culture, and above all her sense of the spiritual, accompanied by an undeniable charism, ensured her perfect skill in confronting the most difficult problems of our times...I can still see her at prayer on New Year’s Eve, in the season of the Coming of the Lord, when I saw her whole being radiant, her glowing expression...I sincerely believe, along with many others, that such personalities are living examples of holiness in our times...*”

COLLABORATORS IN THE “JUSTICE AND PEACE” COMMISSION

Telegrams from the President and Vice-President were completed by one of the members who added to the message: “*...a strong woman in the true sense of the word, she gave more than she ever received. All those who knew her placed great hope in her for the renewal of the Church. Alas, she had to depart from us in response to the Father’s call, leaving us in a poorer state to carry out a task that she could have made easier...*”

BISHOPS

It is not possible to mention all the names; each one called to mind an aspect of Mother Guillemin that impressed him: “*Someone who was so dedicated to her mission in the Church*”; “*who worked with such well-informed zeal and enormous charity for the rebirth of religious institutes in the Church*” ...

One of the bishops had seen her at work over a long period. He wrote: *“Having had the privilege of knowing Mother Guillemin at first hand, both in the North and in the Council, I admired her strong personality endowed with all the gifts of nature and grace. She had a major role in the Church, and it was the Church as a whole that anticipated that she would bring about the aggiornamento that she so well understood, with the same impetus that she had given to her religious family, with her fervent love for the Church and her understanding of the apostolic needs of our times...”*

Another bishop was struck by her interior life: *“she has departed for the life that never ends, in intimate union with God, in a simple response to his call, completely filled with his love. In my encounters with her, I was struck by the depth and clarity of her outlook, her unpretentious greatness, and her integrity.”*

RELIGIOUS

Father Philippe, former Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious and member of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at that time, sent the following testimony: *“With all my priestly mind and heart I am united with you in your mourning and in your prayer. You know the depth of my relationship with your Mother General and how much I appreciated her guidance. I owe a great deal to her for having made it possible for me to establish the International Union of Superiors General after so many years of research and inadequate solutions...”*

A Superioress wrote: *“The entire Church is grateful to her. All our Congregations have been uplifted by her spiritual dynamism, her love of truth, her openness to human problems, her fidelity to true religious consecration...”*

LAITY

Through the words of the President, Bishop Descamps, the lay auditors at the Council, the members of the Council for the Laity, the Permanent Observers of the Holy See with the FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation), the World Office of Catholic Women’s Organisations, and the International Office of Catholic Education, all praised the brilliance of Mother Guillemin.

Civil authorities also expressed their condolences:

- General de Gaulle, President of the French Republic
- Foreign Affairs Minister Couve de Murville
- Head of the Office for Divine Worship
- The Vice President of the Senate who managed to attend the funeral
- A State Council member who had worked with her for ten years on various programmes,

wrote: *“Without hesitation I can say that she stands high above any of the most eminent Superioresses whom I have met: her holiness, profound interior life which included a sense of humility and sincere abnegation to which I can personally attest. However, due to the miracle of balance which to my eyes is the mark of her extraordinary personality, these virtues did not prejudice the strength of her authority: an authority that was full of goodness, good sense, always peaceful and cheerful. Other rare qualities: kindness, sensitivity, conscientiousness, never narrow-minded or faint-hearted. Far from it! A great woman with a broad outlook, a sense of*

vision that was wide and deep, highly capable of noble deeds, able to stand up to others, with a charitable smile, calm authority and remarkable level-headedness..."

Finally, the **nurses** with whom she collaborated on an international and national level: *"Mother Guillemin was one of those rare persons who, wherever they are, make God present."*

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

Naturally, the Visitors, the Provincial Directors and other Vincentians shared in the pain of the Sisters, and from all over the world the Visitatrices received condolences from their bishops. The Province of Krakow has respectfully preserved the letter from their bishop who was Cardinal Carol Woytyla. The Ladies of Charity, the Louise de Marillac Association and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul were united in mourning, both in France and abroad.

In conclusion

Let us conclude with the words of **Bishop Huygue** of Arras in his address to the Religious of the Diocese during the Mass he celebrated at Notre Dame des Ardents for the repose of the soul of Mother Guillemin:

"We gather this evening for this Mass, first of all because I myself mourn this death, for I had great esteem and admiration for Mother Guillemin. It is also so that you will know – I am speaking especially to the Daughters and to you, Religious of the diocese who have come here today to pray with your Sisters – how much the Church in Arras, in the person of its bishop, depends on your presence and your apostolic activity, and shares the feelings in your heart."

I first met Mother Guillemin in Rome, when she was named auditrice for the Council. The French bishops asked her to give a conference on religious life. She accepted with perfect simplicity. She was thoroughly successful with the bishops, for her presentation was so clear and courageous, with admirable emphasis on the essentials.

I would simply like to share with you now, after reflecting on it, what seems to me to have been her charism and grace in the Church.

What first struck me about her appearance is something that I cannot define in words, something that goes beyond virtue. I will try to express my thoughts through some examples. It has been said that in relating to others, two attitudes are possible: that of pride and that of humility, with all the intermediary levels between the two. Humility is generally considered as a virtue. Mother Guillemin went beyond humility, she was not somewhere between pride and humility, rather, she manifested – and I believe these are valid terms – respect for the other and a sense of selflessness.

It was neither a case of superiority, nor of inferiority.

Regardless of who the person was, in interpersonal dialogue, she respected the other person and she took to heart the other person's interests.

Here is an example: Which is more important for a Superioress General: prudence or audacity? Some will say prudence, others audacity. Mother Guillemin went beyond prudence and audacity: she was a realist, and her realism was able to be sometimes prudent, sometimes audacious.

Which is more important for a Superioress General: concern for precision and detail or a global perspective of the whole situation? Here again, she went beyond these two options with her respect for persons, her realism, and openness of mind and heart.

If I had to summarise these first impressions, I would say that she was perfectly balanced, in her deep love for the Lord, for her Sisters, and for all those with whom she came in contact. It was love that created the unity of her life. Love is certainly a theological virtue: magnificent books can be written about it. The challenge is in living it out. Mother Guillemin knew how to translate this love in concrete ways, in human relations.

A second trait possessed by Mother Guillemin was a clear and true sense of religious life in the Church.

What was religious life for her, especially apostolic women's religious life? First of all it was a fundamental option for God. This is true, of course, for all who are baptised. But religious life consists of putting into practice all that baptism calls us to be in our life. Choosing God is an obligation for all Christians, choosing God in an absolute way. Religious consecration serves as a continual reminder to those who are baptised that nothing is more important than God

Secondly, her deep love for the Church, considering the Church as a person. In this sense, she lived out in advance the clear intention of the Council and preceded us in what we still have yet to discover.

The Church, not in the structural sense, nor the societal, not in its administration, or the hierarchy, or the congregations, but the Church as Spouse of Christ. The personal Church that Christ loves and for whom he gave his life.

Finally, her willingness to fully accept the world in order to insert herself into it and to save it. All her efforts during her years in positions of authority were directed towards a grasp of this world in a continually broadened sense, viewed more and more realistically, in order to evangelise it.

I would like to conclude by speaking about her love for persons who are poor. She knew that this love was the binding force of her Congregation. She was aware that this was her call, her vocation, her place in the Church. But in what way? At this time when the Church as a whole was rediscovering the place of poor persons and their place of honour in the Church – “Our lords the poor” as Saint Vincent said – it was still necessary to separate this love from the temptation towards romanticism. There are countless ways to be poor and to serve those who are poor. We can experience them through statistics or by descriptions of them. We can get to know poor people through visiting them. We can get to know them through a greater or

lesser sharing of life with them. We need to realise, however, that there is an experience of poverty that we will never attain: an experience of the depths of misery with no possibility of overcoming it.

The vocation of her Congregation, for Mother Guillemin, was poverty in two particular aspects. It first of all meant the total gift of self to God so that nothing else mattered, absolutely nothing...GOD ALONE! The obstacle to any selfless service of poor persons is that one holds onto something other than God. Secondly, loving poor people for who they are and in the love of Jesus, letting oneself be continually challenged by him, to serve with all the technical means available today, and in the words of Mother Guillemin herself, in making these the instrument of the tenderness of Christ.

I did not intend to deliver a panegyric: we do not know the secrets that lie within hearts. I simply wanted to describe in my own small way what I have perceived of the soul of Mother Guillemin. I hope to have evoked and affirmed for you what was deeply present in her, the reason why she chose to belong entirely to the Lord.

You have been chosen, and each day you must renew your response to this choice. In contemplating the example of one who has guided you in life and who has gone before you in the light of God, you will find strength for today and hope for tomorrow.”

“Mother Guillemin is no long among us! This void, this space that she has left in our lives is the place which God wants to fill. When those human beings on whom we have depended and behind whom we have taken shelter leave us, it is the time to seek once again the solid rock of trust in God, the one whom Scripture calls the “rock of Israel”. It is the hour of Providence for which Saint Vincent had such great devotion.” (Homily of Father Jamet)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Service

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Typed Texts

- Conferences to the Sister Servants 1963
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These texts are to be found in the Archives of the Motherhouse. The Echo publications during the years of her Generalate 1962-1968 contain several important articles, notably the ones on liturgical reform and “Justice and Peace,” the letter of January 1st introducing the notices of deceased Sisters, and the letter of 1966 which addresses the question of aggiornamento. Father Jamet was a faithful contributor to the Echo articles on aggiornamento in the Company.

COVER

Prayer of John Paul II to Our Lady of Lourdes

Hail Mary, poor and humble Woman
Blessed by the Most High!
Virgin of hope, prophesying new times.
We join you in your hymn of praise
celebrating the mercies of the Lord,
announcing the coming of the Kingdom
and complete liberation for mankind.

Hail Mary, humble servant of the Lord,
Glorious Mother of Christ!
Faithful Virgin, hallowed dwelling place of the Word,
teach us to persevere in listening to the Word
and being docile to the voice of the Holy Spirit,
attentive to his promptings in the depths of our conscience
and his manifestations in the events of history.

Hail Mary, Woman of sorrows,
Mother of the living!
Virgin spouse, standing beneath the Cross you became the new Eve.
Be our guide as we journey through the world.
Teach us to live and to give to others the love of Christ,
teach us to live, with You, alongside the countless crosses
on which your Son continues to be crucified.

Hail Mary, Woman of faith,
First among the disciples!
Virgin Mother of the Church, help us always to
witness to the hope within us,
confident always of the goodness of people, and of the love of the Father.
Teach us to build the world, from within ourselves;
in the depths of silence and of prayer
in the joy of fraternal love
in the inestimable fruitfulness of the Cross.

Holy Mary, Mother of believers,
Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us. Amen.

