

May-June, 2010

Spiritual Life

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To all Daughters of Charity

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General

Letter of 22nd May, 2010

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SISTER EVELYNE FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

To all Daughters of Charity

Letter of 24th April 2010

Dear Sisters,

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us!

Several days ago, I received some excellent news from Father Guerra, Postulator of the Congregation of the Mission. He informed me that on April 17th in Rome, the Congress of Theologians unanimously accepted the martyrdom of the servant of God, Marguerite Rutan, Daughter of Charity, who was guillotined in Dax during the French Revolution in 1794. Father Guerra specified that now it is necessary to wait for the next meeting of Cardinals, followed by the final decision of the Holy Father, and that the beatification of Sister Marguerite could very probably be celebrated during the coming months in Dax – a place that is distinctively Vincentian. The success of the cause of Sister Marguerite, introduced at the beginning of the 20th Century, is a grace of this Jubilee Year in honour of the 350th anniversary of the death of Saint Louise and Saint Vincent.

Now it is up to us to learn more about this Daughter of Charity who lived through the years of revolutionary turmoil, underwent harassment and persecution as she continued to serve sick persons, and finally gave her life in order to remain faithful to her Lord and to the Church. A future issue of the Echoes of the Company will present her to us.

Some other community news relates first of all to our Sisters in Haiti. Although the earthquake of January 12th is no longer in the news, Sister Maria Teresa Tapia, the Visitatrice, says that the situation of the victims is still extremely precarious and the distribution of aid is chaotic. She emphasises, though, that there are many signs of hope, too. For example, our Sisters' schools have re-opened, classes are being held in large tents, and design plans are being put in place for the reconstruction of the John Paul II School next to what used to be the Provincial House.

Also, our Sisters have resumed most of their usual ministries and organised missions in the towns at a distance from the capital in order to care for persons who are sick or elderly who have been neglected. The first group of Sister volunteers will be returning home, and six Sisters from other Provinces will be coming to replace them. This experience of interprovincial solidarity has made a deep impression on the Sisters of Haiti as well as on the Sisters who have volunteered, not to mention those who have been helped, and with whom they have collaborated. Also, the Sisters of Haiti who experienced the horror of the earthquake have been able to get away for several days, either to their families, their Provinces of origin or to Santo Domingo or Puerto Rico, the neighboring Provinces who have demonstrated such generous inventiveness.

Similarly, creativity and courage are at work in Chile. The Sisters have organised an operation called “Charity and Mission” to visit, care for and comfort the victims of the earthquake that occurred on February 27th. They are concentrating their efforts on two regions and have established a plan of action in collaboration with the Vincentian Family in Chile, with the participation of Sisters from other Provinces in Latin America. This well-designed mission project is already off to an enthusiastic start. We all remain in union with the efforts of our Sisters in these places, through our thoughts and prayers, and by our joyful witness as Daughters of Charity, wherever we are.

Tomorrow, we will be praying together for vocations, during this year that is dedicated to the priesthood and that has special Vincentian significance as well. Let us ask the Lord for vocations to the Priests of the Mission. The theme for the 47th World Day of Prayer for Vocations: **Witness Awakens Vocations** reminds us of our Inter-Assemblies Document: “*Welcome others into our local communities to experience prayer and service of persons living in poverty.*” As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his letter on the occasion of this day of prayer: “*witness can awaken in others the will to respond, in turn, with generosity to the call of Christ.*”

In the joy of the Easter season, I assure you of my devoted affection and my prayer for each of you,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

SISTER EVELYNE FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

To all Daughters of Charity

Letter of 22nd May 2010

Dear Sisters,

Happy and Holy Feast of Pentecost!

This Jubilee Year is a celebration of joy and gratitude in honour of the 350th anniversary of the death of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, as well as a time of grace and blessings for the entire Company. Throughout these months, thousands of initiatives have been created to make our Vincentian charism more widely known. This occasion also invites us to rekindle the fire of **charity** along the pathways of the **mission** throughout the world.

In union with the entire Vincentian Family, we give thanks to God for the treasure that we have inherited. Likewise, we are grateful for the fidelity of so many Sisters who have preceded us along this course and who have arrived at their final mission in heaven with the lamp of charity burning brightly.

As we know, the Company is called to live in a state of charity, a state of mission. Charity and mission go hand in hand. Charity without mission is inconceivable; mission without charity is meaningless. Charity is most fully manifested through mission, and mission is nourished by charity.

The 2009 General Assembly invited us to renew our fervour and to be open to the transforming Spirit as we journey along the path of our next six years. The Assembly emphatically reminded us that “*the Company is missionary by nature,*”¹ that the Charity of Christ urges us and knows no borders.² This is the underlying motivation that should guide each of our steps as we feed the flame of our charism, convinced that we are responsible for the Company of the future.³

How can we fan this missionary fire that our Founders enkindled in the Company? The echo of their words resounds powerfully in our hearts as we recall that even in the midst of serious difficulties, they did not hesitate to send Daughters of Charity on various pathways throughout the world: “*That’s how you must act in order to be good Daughters of Charity, and to go wherever God wants: if to Africa, then to Africa... you’re Daughters of Charity, you must go.*”⁴

During the General Council’s recent times of reflection, we asked one another what concrete actions we hope for the Company as the fruit of this Jubilee Year. To what forms of poverty would Saint Vincent and Saint Louise send us today? What missionary pathways would they trace out for us? We imagined that they would want us to create new implantations, especially in Africa, to strengthen certain missions in Muslim countries and in other places experiencing extreme difficulty and to create a new form of mission. This is why we are launching this missionary appeal to each one of you. Through prayer and discernment, you will know how to respond to this invitation... by your availability to be sent on mission, through your generosity in allowing a Sister to go, by your prayer and offering...

With Saint Louise and the Blessed Virgin, we ask for the gift of the Spirit, enabling the Company to experience a never-ending Pentecost. This in turn will keep us ready and available to respond courageously and prophetically to the appeals of people living in poverty “here and there”, and to answer the specific call of this Jubilee Year.

Devotedly and affectionately, and assuring you of my prayer,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

¹ C. 25a

² Cf. 2 Cor 5:14

³ Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009-2015, pages 15 and 25

⁴ Saint Vincent, Conference of October 18th 1655; Coste X, p. 105

WITH MARY, “LET US BE OPEN TO THE TRANSFORMING SPIRIT”

Inter-Assemblies Document, 2009-2015

With Mary, “let us be open to the transforming Spirit”

Introduction

On November 21st 1964, after the adoption of the Constitution on the Church by the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI declared: *“With the promulgation today of the Constitution which has, as its crowning summit, an entire chapter dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, we can justly affirm that the present session is concluding with an incomparable hymn of praise in honor of Mary. In fact it is the first time...that an ecumenical Council has presented such a vast synthesis of Catholic doctrine on the place that the Blessed Virgin Mary occupies in the mystery of her Son and of His Church.”*¹

The fundamental intuition of the Council was to situate Mary within the mystery of her Son and of the Church. Mary has a pivotal role in salvation. *“Knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church.”*² Mary provides Christ his first experience of self-emptying, the sign of his love. So it is that Christ ensures that Mary is the first to experience salvation.

At the approach of the great Jubilee of the Incarnation, Pope John Paul II emphasised Mary’s role in the revelation of God’s plan. Mary can be found at each stage of the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption. She introduces us to the heart of the mystery of Christ and the Church, the heart of love that God reveals to us and shares with us. She is the “door” that is open in our world so that the Word of God can be received. Wherever God’s pathway and humanity’s pathway intersect, God confides Mary as a mother to guide us to rediscover our vocation as God’s sons and daughters. In contemplating the face of Mary illuminated by the Spirit, we add nothing to the Word of God; we simply learn how to be open to God’s gifts.

Within the dynamic of the Spirit of Pentecost and the feast of the Visitation, let us be *“Open to the Transforming Spirit”* as the Inter-Assemblies Document 2009-2015 invites us to be. In order to enter into this dynamic of openness to the Spirit, let us first take a look at the place of Mary and the Spirit in the New Testament, and then listen once more to the spiritual testament of Louise de Marillac regarding the role that the Holy Spirit and Mary had in her life. Finally, with Mary, let us reflect on several important points related to the particular spirit of the Daughters of Charity.

I – MARY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

¹ Introduction to Chapter 8 of Lumen Gentium

² 21st November 1962

The entire Bible gives witness of God's desire to establish a covenant with humanity, a covenant that would be written in human hearts by the action of the Spirit, to lead them to encounter God, to allow themselves to be shaped by God's breath of life and to participate in the life of God. Mary is the success story of Sacred History, the perfect fulfilment of God's covenant with humanity. In Mary, we contemplate the model of a heart that is open to God's gifts.

In the Bible, the Spirit of God is omnipresent. Theologians explain, however, that there are only three passages where the Spirit of God is associated with the verb "*to come upon*". The first of these three passages is Isaiah 32:15 in which Isaiah prophesied that the Spirit would be poured forth on the day of salvation. The two other occasions are the Annunciation and Pentecost. The Gospel according to St. Luke, especially the Infancy Narratives, brings us into the setting of welcoming the Spirit of God, the first step towards salvation. The second book of St. Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, is also inaugurated by the descent of the Spirit in a new manner, coming from on high.

MARY ON THE DAY OF THE ANNUNCIATION

At the beginning of his Gospel, St. Luke invites us to contemplate Mary's attitude in her response to the message of the angel. On the day of the Annunciation, God gave of himself by pure grace. All that was needed was a simple yes from a heart that was totally available in faith.

Clearly, Mary was perfectly open and available to allowing the Spirit to prepare her. The angel Gabriel didn't address her by her usual name but gave her a new name: "*full of grace*," as the work of grace that God had brought about. The mystery of God was already dwelling within Mary: "*The Lord is with you.*" To the one chosen to bring God to his people, God revealed himself and gave of himself through her.

Although this was entirely God's initiative, it was up to Mary to be open and allow God to complete this plan of love. When she accepted the mission that God was confiding to her, the angel Gabriel said to her: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you.*" (Lk 1:35) This was the conception of the Son of God. Mary was filled with the Spirit in view of her maternal mission, entirely taken up by the Spirit's power. From that time onward, Mary was led on by the strength of the new life dwelling within her, and the Spirit radiated from her.

We learn to recognise Mary as the woman whose entire existence and entire reason for being was the mission of Jesus. She is always completely open to the Spirit; she lives for God alone. In her we find only God and can contemplate God's total gift of self.

Mary is the witness and the source of the new Creation that bursts forth from the heart of God. She begins the Church's mission of giving Jesus to the world.

MARY, IN THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

Mary is there at the **foot of the Cross**, with the same dispositions that she had in the beginning. Her faith, already put to the test throughout Jesus' ministry, was purified to the utmost degree by his death. Totally open to and associated with the mission of salvation, Mary welcomed the Spirit of the Father, given by the Son. At the moment when Jesus yielded

up his Spirit on the Cross, he gave us his mother: “*When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.*” In this way, the mother of Jesus became “the mother” received by the disciple, not as someone seeking refuge with him, but in order that his home would become a dwelling place for the Spirit.

On the day of the Ascension, Jesus announced to the disciples just before he ascended to his Father: “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit **has come upon you**; and you will be my witnesses*” (Acts 1:8). However, the disciples’ minds were still fixed on the re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6) and the time of waiting seemed very long.

In the Upper Room, we see the disciples “*continuing with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren (Acts 1:14). We see Mary prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation.*”³ “*Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room ... In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of ‘birth from the Holy Spirit.’*”⁴ Mary remained present among the disciples and helped them persevere in prayer. She assisted them in preparing to receive the Spirit in a significant way. Mary enabled the Church to be born as a new creation in the Spirit, just as her openness of heart had made it possible for the Word to become flesh.

“*The child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*” (Mt 1:20), the angel had said to Joseph to show him that God himself was at work in Mary to bring about Jesus’ birth. The same expression “*to be begotten by the Spirit*” is found only one other time in the New Testament, in the conversation with Nicodemus, where it is mentioned three times in succession in reference to the spiritual formation of Christians.⁵ The mystery of the Church, animated by the Spirit, came about through Mary.

At the Annunciation, the Spirit’s presence in Mary caused Jesus to be conceived in her. In the Upper Room, the Spirit brought forth the mystical body of Jesus. The work of the Holy Spirit, begun in Mary, continued through the disciples as they in turn entered into this mystery.

This was the birth of the Church, and afterwards, “*instead of Mary setting out for the house of Elizabeth, the apostles set out for all the people on earth. This was the Church’s Visitation on a worldwide scale.*”⁶ The Spirit’s breath, in tongues of fire, inspired the disciples to spread the Word “*in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

Pentecost is a sort of Annunciation for the disciples: the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit in view of their mission as apostles. “*Like Mary, who first believed ... the Church becomes a mother when... she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit ...*”⁷ “*...from Mary the Church also learns her own*

³ RM 24, quoting LG 59

⁴ RM 24, 4

⁵ Cf. Jn 3, 5-6-8

⁶ Cf. R. Laurentin, *Court traité* p. 147 French (*Short Treatise*)

⁷ RM 8, 29 and RM 42, 1

motherhood... just as Mary is at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation, so the Church is always at the service of the mystery of adoption to sonship through grace.”⁸ “Therefore, ‘the Church in her apostolic work also rightly looks to her who brought forth Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, so that through the Church Christ may be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful also.’”⁹

“Mary is not only the model and figure of the Church; she is much more. For, ‘with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development’ of the sons and daughters of Mother Church ... as the Second Vatican Council teaches...”¹⁰

II – MARY AND THE SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF SAINT LOUISE

1623, THE LIGHT OF PENTECOST

The Light of Pentecost of June 4th 1623 was also a decisive event for Louise and for the Company. The coming of the Holy Spirit enlightened the heart of Louise. She was 32 years old, and this marked the beginning of a completely new path on her journey. After a long and difficult period of uncertainty, she received the assurance by a sort of promise that one day she would make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for the service of poor persons. “How would that be?” God sent help through the person of Vincent de Paul as her guide. Louise was filled with a “Light” from the Spirit in view of her mission to found the Company whose purpose would be to bring the fire of God’s love to the poor. **Pentecost 1623 was a sort of Annunciation for Louise about co-founding the Company of the Daughters of Charity.**

As the Annunciation was for Mary, this event was a turning point in Louise’s life. This new pathway began with her yes to the invitation that God was extending to her. Animated by the strength of the Spirit, Louise was very determined to discover God’s will and remained steadfast for many years in pursuit of her goal. The Spirit was inspiring her, and the life of the poor entered more and more deeply into her heart.

Louise, however, had a clear sense that God had something else in mind. She strove to imitate the patience of the apostles as they awaited the Holy Spirit, after Jesus had been taken from their sight at his Ascension. During a retreat around 1632, she wrote: *“I must perseveringly await the coming of the Holy Spirit although I do not know when that will be. I must accept this uncertainty as well as my inability clearly to perceive at this time the path which God wishes me to follow in His service. I must abandon myself entirely to His Providence so as to be completely His. In order to prepare my soul for this, I must willingly renounce all things to follow Him.”* (Spiritual Writings, A 5, p. 717)

Ten years after the Light of Pentecost at Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, the feast of Pentecost 1623, led Louise towards a clearer understanding: its fruits would be made manifest in November 1633, when the first Daughters of Charity gathered around Louise. From that moment on, Louise would lead the Company towards the Spirit of Pentecost.

⁸ RM 43, 2

⁹ RM 28, 1cf. LG 65

¹⁰ RM 44, 1-2 – cf LG 63

1642: THE FALL OF THE CEILING

On the eve of Pentecost 1642, another unexpected event strengthened Louise's faith in the Holy Spirit. Louise was in the room in the Motherhouse that was used for community meetings and gatherings of the Ladies of Charity when two Sisters came in, one after the other, to warn her that they had heard cracking sounds. After the second Sister had come in, Louise agreed to leave the room. She was barely at the threshold of the door when suddenly the ceiling caved in. This incident that could have been a catastrophe was not only a new opportunity to have trust in Divine Providence but also provided a springboard for the belief that God desired the growth of this new work that He was safeguarding.

Louise wrote later: *"The day and the season when God allowed us to recognise His Divine Providence by the remarkable events surrounding the fall of our ceiling reminded me once again of my profound interior conversion at that time when His goodness gave me light and understanding concerning the great anxieties and difficulties which I was then experiencing."*¹¹

Louise attached extraordinary importance to this event and gave herself over totally to the action of the Holy Spirit. Recognising the need to make room for this Spirit of love, she wanted to avoid being an obstacle to it in any way, and placed herself in the *"dispositions of the holy Apostles as they prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit."*¹²

Guided by the Spirit, her heart filled with the fire of God's love, Louise helped inflame the hearts of her daughters. She believed that the entire Company *"should have great devotion to the Feast of Pentecost ... this should be manifested in a very particular way."*¹³ She invited the Sisters to pray to receive the Holy Spirit: *"Pray for us, my dear Sisters, that Our Lord Jesus Christ may bestow His Spirit upon us on this holy feast so that we may be so filled with His Spirit that we may do nothing or say nothing except for His glory and His holy love..."*¹⁴ *"Each year, from the Ascension to Pentecost, all our sisters shall practice interior recollection in honour of the plan of the Son of God when He commanded His Apostles to remain in a state of inactivity while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit..."*¹⁵

As the years passed, Louise became more and more open to the Holy Spirit, and it was very clear that she possessed extraordinary grace: that of *"pure love"*. Through the power of the Spirit's love, she wrote magnificent reflections intended for all Daughters of Charity who are called by Our Lord to *"the practice of pure love"*. This *"pure love"* that she lived and whose fire she communicated, led Louise more intensely towards the service of her neighbour: *"God led me to understand that the graces which He granted to me were not for me, but because I belonged to Him as I was."*¹⁶

During a retreat sometime round 1657 she focused her reflection on the Holy Spirit and marvelled at the splendour of the gift of God that allowed her to draw life from the divine life itself. For Louise, the Holy Spirit was the fervour of love that gives us the strength to live as true believers: *"Souls that are truly poor and desirous of serving God should place their trust*

¹¹ *Spiritual Writings*, (SW) A. 75, p. 768

¹² SW, A 10, p. 704, Resolutions for the Period from Ascension to Pentecost

¹³ SW, A. 75, p. 768

¹⁴ SW, L. 345, p. 350, To Sr. Jeanne Lepintre, May 19th, 1651

¹⁵ SW, A. 75 p. 769

¹⁶ SW, p. 769, A. 75

*in the coming of the Holy Spirit... He will give them the disposition necessary to accomplish the holy will of God... ”*¹⁷

LOUISE’S THEOLOGICAL FAITH IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Louise never imagined the Holy Spirit as anything other than in the context of the Holy Trinity. However, she continually returned to the idea of the Holy Spirit’s mission in the mystery of the Incarnation. This insistence explains her deep devotion to the Word made Flesh and the Blessed Virgin. The endless exchange among the three Divine Persons, the Holy Breath of the Father and the Son are communicated through a mere creature: Mary. God gives the Spirit, and Mary is the pure heart totally receptive to the Gift. *“Eternal Father, I beg this mercy of You in the name of the design which You had from all eternity in the Incarnation of Your Son and through His merits. My Saviour, grant me this grace for the love which you bear for the Holy Virgin. Holy Spirit, operate this marvel in your unworthy subject by the loving union which You have from all eternity with the Father and the Son.”*¹⁸

While being aware that the Three Persons participated in the Incarnation, Louise recognises in a special way what the Holy Spirit has accomplished in the heart of the Virgin Mary. The Most Holy Virgin is the *“Spouse of the Holy Spirit”, “the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit”*. These are the foundations that underpin Louise’s devotion, in a unified way, to the Trinity, the Word Incarnate, the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Virgin. *“What is there, Holy Virgin, between God and you? God is in you by filial right. You are the first in the union that he has attained with human nature by the mystery of the Incarnation. You enter into a steadfast covenant with the eternal Father by your maternity towards the Son. You are truly the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit by the Incarnation that he brought about in you.”*¹⁹

Louise placed great importance on the days that the Apostles and Mary spent waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In her letters, and more particularly in her meditations on “the coming of the Holy Spirit”, Louise referred to the attitude of openness that the apostles had, after the example of Mary. She led them along the pathway to God. The Church is the product of this Gift of Love from the Father and the Son that brings forth life: *“What more could the Spirit of Consolation, whom the Father would send by You, do for them? ... You bring to completion the work of founding the Holy Church... by instructing... giving her the power to perform miracles... You operated in them holiness of life...”*²⁰

Mary is the masterpiece of life in the Spirit. Her role in the Church is a continuation of her motherly role for the Word Incarnate. The Spirit living in Mary allowed the Word to take human form. For this reason, she was already the Church, receiving life from God and giving life to new children of God. As a model for living in the Spirit, Mary helps us to be open to the presence of the Holy Spirit. In this way, our souls can be *“in an appropriate disposition to do the holy will of God.”*²¹

1658, CONSECRATION OF THE COMPANY TO MARY IMMACULATE, “THE ONLY MOTHER OF THE COMPANY”

¹⁷ SW, p. 802, A. 25, The Purity of Love Necessary to Receive the Holy Spirit

¹⁸ SW, p. 819, 4th meditation

¹⁹ Livre gris, p. 833 (French 1961 edition, not available in English)

²⁰ SW, p. 820, A. 26, Reasons for giving Oneself to God in order to Receive the Holy Spirit, 6th meditation

²¹ Livre gris, p. 823 (French 1961 edition, not available in English)

The Virgin Mary, seen in her relationship with the Blessed Trinity, is the “*beloved Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son and worthy Spouse of the Holy Spirit.*”²² This places her at the heart of God’s great loving plan for humanity. Louise saw Mary as someone who helps us to live by God’s grace. She is the Immaculate One because of the grace of God. She who is full of grace is a model for what we are called to become: creatures of grace in Jesus Christ.²³

Beginning with Pentecost in 1642, Louise knew that the Company would only exist because of grace and would only persevere by the grace of God. The Company must dwell in the shadow of the Power from on high if it is to faithfully serve the poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity. In 1644, during her pilgrimage to Chartres, Louise consecrated the Company to Mary. Mary became a new creation because she remained in the shadow of the Power from on high. The love that flows from God comes to the Company through its connection with Mary. Louise wanted the hearts of her daughters to be united to the heart of Mary, a woman who was totally given to God from the first instant of her existence. At Louise’s request, Vincent de Paul consecrated the Company to the Immaculate One, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church, on December 8th, 1658, and Louise herself declared Mary to be the “*only Mother of the Company.*”

III – MARY AND THE SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

“*OPEN TO THE TRANSFORMING SPIRIT*”²⁴

It is easy to see connections between the Annunciation, Pentecost, our vocation as Daughters of Charity and even the apparitions of 1830. All these can be considered ways in which the Company, through Mary, has been prepared for the extraordinary mission entrusted to it.

In the light of expressions used by the Vatican Council, “Mary, fashioned by the Holy Spirit,”²⁵ the title of the Inter-Assemblies Document: “*Open to the Transforming Spirit*” seems to be a form of annunciation that the Lord addresses to us today. Could we see this as an invitation to allow ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to live our vocation with greater intensity?

The Spirit of God which covered and filled the heart of Mary is the same Spirit that descended on Jesus and attested to his divine sonship at the moment of his baptism (Lk 3:22) and at the Transfiguration (Lk 9:34). This is the same Spirit that inflamed the hearts and lips of the disciples at Pentecost, and the same Spirit that illuminated the soul of Saint Louise. Today, that same Spirit comes to fill the hearts of the Daughters of Charity.

Can we consider that the invitation to be “*Open to...*” is a reminder that God’s initiative is always our priority? For our part, we need to welcome this initiative in order to allow God’s work to be accomplished in us. This consists first of all in being open to receive the One who is pure Gift. God does not want to transform us in spite of ourselves. God offers

²² SW, A. 4, p. 696, Oblation to the Blessed Virgin

²³ Cf. Vatican Council II (LG 61).

²⁴ Inter-Assemblies Document 2009-2015

²⁵ LG 56

us the Spirit continually, but God also waits for our hearts to say yes before filling them with his Spirit.

Mary, the first Christian and consecrated Virgin par excellence, accompanies us as we strive to be “open to the transforming Spirit.” As the “*only Mother of the Company*” she is an example for us of a humble, simple and charitable servant (cf. C. 15). In her, we contemplate the image of our vocation.

THE HUMILITY OF THE IMMACULATE ONE, TOTALLY OPEN TO THE SPIRIT

God looked upon Mary’s humility from the first moment of her conception, for a heart that is receptive and emptied of everything else irresistibly seeks to be filled by God’s grace. Mary welcomed the gift of God, her entire being reached fulfilment in God, and she allowed herself to be inhabited by Love. Since everything within her came from the Holy Spirit, she became the pure reflection of the humility of God. In her we contemplate God’s gift of self. With her, we welcome the gift of God’s spirit of humility in order to become, like her, grace-filled beings in Jesus Christ. Mary Immaculate shows us that our mission is first of all to open ourselves to the outpouring of the Spirit, to allow ourselves to be transfigured by the Spirit who can turn our ordinary lives into a dwelling place for God, a temple of the Spirit. In this way, God’s Spirit can be communicated to those who are poor.

By her profound humility of heart, Mary helps us discover that humility, instead of being a negative concept, is, in fact, a divine quality, an attitude of the heart which gives access to the presence of God. In fact, all sorts of misunderstandings surround this beautiful virtue, distorting it of all its attraction. Its connection with the word “humiliation” has reduced its meaning to either resignation, or self deprecation even to the point of abnegation. Authentic humility is not a human matter. Humility is not defined by the insignificance of minor tasks done, any more than the greatness of projects defines pride. Humility is rather the state of not seeking to rely on one’s own capabilities. Mary teaches us the beauty of humility, this first beatitude that opens the door to all the others because it is the essential condition needed for welcoming God’s gifts.

Mary also helps us to journey along the path of humility, this space in which God always goes before us. The spirit of humility deflects our focus from ourselves and turns us towards God so that God can gaze on us and we can listen to God saying to us: “*I must stay at your house today.*”(Luke 19) Humility allows us to be open to being renewed in God’s love. Salvation, the perfect gift, envelops our sinfulness, waiting only for our heart to say yes. This attitude of openness leads us to expect everything from God, and to become grace-filled beings in Jesus Christ.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE SERVANT OF THE FATHER’S PLAN

Mary, full of grace, is also a woman who is free, who does not keep God’s gift for herself alone. The depths of her heart reach out to God whom she loves, to renew her belonging to God and her offering of self. She says only one thing: “*I am the servant of the Lord.*” “*Mary is total response and correspondence*”²⁶ with grace. Father Maximilian Kolbe recognised Mary as the creature “*who was in no way separated from God’s will.*” Mary placed herself in God’s hands, because her heart was in a state of perfect availability. She

²⁶ *La fille de Sion*, p. 74 (French) by J. Ratzinger (*Daughter of Sion*)

consented to God's plan, and responded to his love without any desire to follow her own will. Her entire being identified with God's mission. In Mary the servant, we contemplate the One who became the Servant of all, obedient unto death. Mary leads us to the source of her virginal offering. Like Mary, we, too, can become authentic servants of the Lord through the gift of simplicity

By the simplicity of her life, Mary the Servant teaches us to grow in this attitude which develops our singleness of heart, ongoing seeking of God's will and the desire to carry it out effectively and simply, with great availability. Simplicity is what allows us to correspond to the gift of the Spirit that has been given to us. It allows us to bring forth from within us our "yes" as a servant, in order to give a response of love and to collaborate with God in his loving plan. Mary guides us towards an attitude of great docility to the mission confided to us. In this way, we imitate the obedience of Christ the Servant.

THE CHARITY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, MOTHER OF MERCY AND HOPE OF THE LOWLY

As soon as the Angel announced God's message, Mary, impelled by the force of God's love dwelling within her, rose up and set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Mary brought to her the greeting that she herself had first of all received, sharing with Elizabeth the joy that came from God. Mary welcomes and communicates to others the charity that comes from God.

At Golgotha, standing near her Son at the foot of the Cross, Mary welcomes the Spirit of the Father given by Jesus. This God is capable of loving to the very end and inspiring love. Mary's charity is intimately linked to the Passion of her Son's love. Mary is called to share her life with the disciple and so become his mother. It is the charity of Christ crucified that impels her to accept John as a son in order that he might become a dwelling place of the Spirit. In this way she becomes our mother, our model and advocate; all these roles come from the Holy Spirit. As Mother of the Church, she is for us the mother of Grace. Sharing everything, she communicates the fulness of the Spirit dwelling within her to all those who wish to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. It is in learning to participate in Mary's pure faith that we can then truly be "Church." In Mary's heart, we dwell in the Heart of God, and we contemplate God's love for Jesus, expressed in the heart of a mother.

Completely filled with the love of Christ, Mary teaches us to grow in charity that surpasses all our understanding. It is the charity of Christ crucified that allows us to live in a "state of charity," to act with Christ and in his name, in affective and effective ways. It is also the charity of Jesus Christ crucified that impels us to see the poor as our lords and masters, to recognise God's presence within them and in their lives, and to reveal him to others.

Conclusion

As Mother of the Church, Mary sustains the faith of the Church. As *only Mother of the Company*, Mary sustains the faith of the Daughters of Charity. She is not content to serve just as an example; she is the model for how we can be filled with the breath of the Spirit. This is why, each day, "*we take Mary into our homes*" in order to be renewed by the strength of the Spirit. Through the hearts of the Daughters of Charity, God wants the Spirit of humility, simplicity and charity to dwell with humanity, especially with those people who live in poverty.

Sister Anne Prevost

Daughter of Charity

FLORENCE GILLET, THEOLOGIAN

The “Petrine principle” as evident in the life of John Paul II

A key to understanding the pontificate of John Paul II
in the light of the “Marian principle”

Notes taken during a conference given to the Sisters and lay people who serve the Chapel at rue du Bac

I have been invited to speak to you about authority in the Church because of my experience of working for six years at the Pontifical Council for the promotion of unity among Christians. I reflected on my experience as I was preparing for my presentation here. I would sum it up in some phrases that I propose to develop in my presentation. It has become clear to me that Pope John Paul II strove to carry out his Petrine ministry against the background of the “*Marian Principle*” alongside the “*Petrine Principle*” two closely linked and complementary principles. This is what I would like to testify to and illustrate today.

THE MARIAN PRINCIPLE IN THE CHURCH AS DESIRED BY POPE JOHN PAUL II, IN PARALLEL WITH THE PETRINE PRINCIPLE

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS

To speak about authority in the Church as the exercise of the “Petrine Ministry,” is an expression used today to emphasise service, rather than speaking about the “pontificate” or primacy of the Pope. With this expression, It is important to understand this expression in the context of the Church as a whole, in the Church in its mystery. To understand this Petrine service, we need to ask what the Church is, what is its nature? Is the Church authority (the Pope and bishops); is it the sacraments that Jesus Christ communicates to us? No, this does not give the whole picture.

John Paul II himself, and after him, Benedict XVI, when speaking of the mystery of the Church, used a term that was suggested by a great twentieth century theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar. This term signifies the “Marian dimension” or the “Marian Principle” of the Church.

I am not an expert in ecclesiology, and I have limited knowledge of the thinking of Von Balthasar. However, it seems to me that in order to understand the meaning and significance of Petrine ministry, both in theory and as John Paul II understood it, we need to situate it against the background of the Marian principle in the Church. To do so, I use as a reference an excellent study by an Irish theologian, Father Brendan Leahy, on the Marian profile in the Church.¹

¹ Brendan Leahy *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 1996.

This approach is useful and interesting because it helps us understand our faith more deeply. Personally, it gave me valuable insight into understanding the Church and the tensions that exist within it. These insights, in turn, can allow us to better situate ourselves within the Church, and to be more aware of ways we can support it. In other words, it helps us love the Church more.

In addition, it is reasonable to speak of this dimension because the last two popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, have themselves spoken extensively about the concept in order to place their ministry in the context of the Church. They spoke of the relationship between these two aspects, the Marian and Petrine principles. John Paul II went so far as to say that “*At the dawn of the new millennium, we can joyfully discern that “Marian profile” of the Church which epitomises the deepest meaning of Conciliar renewal.*”²

Benedict XVI, recalling similar statements by Pope Wojtyla, did not hesitate to affirm that the Marian principle in the Church “is even more fundamental” than the *Petrine* principle and that the latter must be considered in the light of the former.³ In the appendix you will find the main texts of these two Popes on this subject.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE “MARIAN PRINCIPLE” AND THE “PETRINE PRINCIPLE”?

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MARIAN PRINCIPLE

Hans Urs Von Balthasar, using the Gospel as his starting point, said that “The Risen Christ, who wishes to remain in his Church until the end of time, cannot avoid being surrounded by the ‘constellation’ of persons, that is, the group of persons who were part of his historical life.”⁴ This follows from the idea that the Gospel, in the words of Von Balthasar, “is not only a spiritual account but a theological one as well. It is much more than just a morally edifying account.”⁵

Since Jesus, during his earthly life, was surrounded by this “human constellation” made up of Mary, John the Baptist, the twelve apostles, the two sisters from Bethany, and others with them, we cannot think that this constellation only existed at the very beginnings of the Church. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, not only Peter, but others, too, received “missions that are the source, [the principle] of other missions in the Church. These missions continue to be alive as well and continue to be represented in the Church.”⁶ In the new community that came forth from the Resurrection, each of these figures remains – with their experience of responding to the incarnation of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ – as a constitutive dimension of his Body, the Church.

This experience as the Church first began to develop, can be regarded as an anticipation of how the Church’s path would unfold. The Risen Jesus journeys in the midst of a people so united that it is one body, one soul. The people, though, are not a monolithic,

² General Audience of November 25th, 1998, in L’Osservatore Romano, daily publication in Italy on November 26, 1998, p. 6.

³ Homily for the Mass of March 25th 2006 for new cardinals.

⁴ See *Der antiromische Affekt*, (Freiburg in Breisgau, 1974) pp 115-187, here p. 136

⁵ Ibid p. 125

⁶ Ibid., p. 133

uniform reality, but rather a body animated by various charisms, with different ways of expressing their faith.

Other underlying principles according to the Gospel

Let us describe some of these underlying principles which remain constant over time.

It is clear that **Peter**, the first of the apostles, finds his mission continued in the Pope and the bishops. The bishops gathered at Chalcedon exclaimed: “Peter speaks through the intermediary of Leo.” This refers to the idea that even though Peter was one specific person, he is mysteriously present in his successors.

Other personalities also have “underlying” historical figures who remain in the life of the Church. **John the Baptist**, who gave his life in witness to Jesus the Truth, continues to be present in the Church in the aspect of martyrdom. In the 20th century, there were as many martyrs as in all the preceding centuries combined.

The **beloved disciple**, John, represents the aspect of contemplative love which remains ever present in the heart of the Church. This dimension is represented by all those who make a commitment to live the evangelical counsels and whose mission is one of contemplative love. By their life and their witness, they communicate the message that love triumphs over everything.

The **principle of James** is based on the “brother-cousin” of the Lord who seems to have taken the place of Peter when the latter left Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). At the first Council in Jerusalem he played a decisive role in achieving reconciliation between the Christians of Jewish origin and the Christians from among the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-21). James represents, above all, the continuity between the old and the new covenant, or tradition. This is also a stable dimension: to preserve the sense of history, continuity, tradition, and to return regularly to the origins.

Paul did not know the historical Jesus, but the Risen Christ manifested himself to Paul in such a unique and significant way as to render him part of the “constellation” of persons around Jesus at the time of the foundation of the Church. Paul is a missionary, the apostle to the Gentiles. His mission continues in the unexpected birth and continually new missions never before seen in the history of the Church. This is a prophetic principle, which includes the great missionary charisms, the major conversions, and the extraordinary visions that are lavished on the Church thanks to the words that come from the Holy Spirit.

There is also the mission of the two sisters from Bethany, **Martha and Mary**, who continue to live in the Church in the experience of hospitality, service, friendship and concrete examples of love that we find in the Church. And we could continue these examples in bringing to light how all the initial missions have continued throughout history in the many aspects of the Church’s life and faith.

The presence and the **charism of Mary** also continue in the life of the Church. Moreover, because of her special place in the mystery of salvation, Mary has a mission and charism in the Church which is included in and which animates from within all the other principles. By her double “Fiat” (at the time of the annunciation and at the foot of the cross),

Mary possesses the authentic and universal spirit that is the basis of the whole range of charisms that support and enrich the people of God en route throughout history.

Viewing the Church as being made up of various principles that relate to one another, can help us to understand it. We don't all possess the same charism, and we should be happy that we are not all identical. We should also be grateful to God for the charism or the principle that others emphasise and express. Until we have reached that point, we are far from this house and school of communion that Pope John Paul II wished for in his *Novo millennio ineunte*. Certainly, tension can arise among different and even opposing principles, but mutual respect and increasing love is also possible. "Regard others as better than yourselves" as Saint Paul said (Phil 2, 3).

Theological approach to the Marian principle

In the life of the Church, there are two distinct dimensions. The first aspect is the gift of God, which includes revelation, the gift of the Word of God, and the Word made flesh (the objective principle). The second is the response of welcoming and receiving this gift (the subjective principle).

With regard to the gift, from the apostolic age onward (cf. Acts 4:32), there is emphasis on three supporting columns on which the Church stands as the people of God: the Word, the sacraments and the ordained ministers. This is the foundation of the Church, the rock, (the origin of the name of the head of the apostles) on which the entire edifice is built. This rock is Christ himself present in the midst of the community. Christ in his paschal mystery speaks and acts through the Word, the sacraments and the ministers. The Church, a reality instituted by Christ, is founded on this.

On their own, however, these columns are not enough to account for what the Church is. They do not give an exact idea of what the Church is, for the Church only takes shape in history if it finds in us some connection with these gifts. This is what forms the second dimension of receiving and welcoming the gift. This is the existential actualisation that Hans Urs Von Balthasar called the *Marian dimension*, the Marian profile of the Church, since Mary is the first one who believed and the model of Christian and ecclesial life.⁷

It can be said that the entire history of the Church, and even the history of humanity, is the time that exists between the gift of Christ (his death and resurrection) and our existence and response: the response which began with Mary; in her it was a total response. This response will be fully accomplished when the entire Church and humanity become "Marian", that is, completely open to God and God's gifts, dwelling place of the Word so that we become permeated with the Spirit of the Risen Christ, bringing about communion.

All salvation history is a history of covenant. A covenant always implies two partners: the Marian principle is the response to the covenant proposed by God. The gift of the Father (Christ) was given to the Church, but this requires a response.

⁷ Benedict XVI: "Every Ecclesial Community, like the Mother of Christ, is called to accept with total generosity the mystery of God who comes to dwell within her and guides her steps in the ways of love. This is the path along which I chose to launch my Pontificate, inviting everyone, with my first Encyclical, to build up the Church in charity as a 'community of love' (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, Part II)." Homily of March 25th, 2006

In the Church's history, there has been an evolution of thought regarding Mary's relationship with the Church. The 20th century opened a new period for the Church. Today the Marian element is being restored, encouraging the hierarchy and bringing life to the laity. As a result of a renewed focus on the Word (biblical movement) and the Fathers of the Church (patristic movement), there is an imperceptible shift from a purely devotional veneration of Mary towards a deeper understanding of this *Marian principle or profile* in the Church.

2 – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “MARIAN PRINCIPLE” AND “PETRINE PRINCIPLE” ACCORDING TO VON BALTHASAR

Although the Marian principle encompasses everything, there needs to be deeper understanding of the relationship between it and the Petrine principle. The consequence of what has just been said is that there needs to be a real and dynamic relationship between the Petrine principle (the dimension of the gift coming from Christ) and the Marian profile (the dimension of the response, the use of this gift which is expressed in a special way in charisms).

On the one hand, the Petrine profile provides an “objective” witness to the Word of God, communicating the grace of Christ in the sacraments and serving to unite the Church through its authority of teaching the faith and the ministry of government. On the other hand, the charisms, as an expression of the Marian profile, give support to our lives and help us to respond ever more faithfully to the gift of Christ as Mary did.

What sort of relationship should there be between those who carry out ministry (which is also a charism) and those engaged in a more vital and existential aspect and who have a prophetic charism? The letter to the Ephesians says that the people of God are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2, 20), forming unity through love for one another.

The Petrine principle, and the Marian principle, in other words, ministry and charisms, are called to be in dynamic relationship with one another in the light of the spirituality of communion, in keeping with the circular nature of relationships that characterise this Church-communion as participation in the life and the love of the three Divine Persons.

Von Balthasar wrote: “*The Church of Christ, according to Saint Paul, was founded on the apostles and prophets, on ministry and charism. More precisely, since ministry should not proceed without charism, the Church is founded on the objective – Petrine – and subjective charism, and on objective and subjective holiness.*”⁸

The “objective holiness” in the Church is the *Petrine principle* and “subjective holiness” is the *Marian principle*.

He then gives a very beautiful definition of the Church: “In the kingdom of reciprocal love, which is the Church...there is a continual, dynamic relationship between these two principles”⁹ in line with a “Trinitarian logic.”

⁸ See *Schwester im Geist* (Einsiedeln, 1983), p. 68

⁹ See *Christen sind einfaltig* (Einsiedeln, 1983), p. 68

Von Balthasar continues: these two principles (Petrine and Marian) are the charisms that the Holy Spirit has given to the Church: “The institution and charism, ministry and holiness, are inseparably united in the same origin and purpose.”¹⁰ In fact, they come from the Holy Spirit and lead to unity.

*“In Christ’s Church, the Holy Spirit acts as an objective Spirit (in structure) and subjectively, as an institution, rule or discipline and also as inspiration, obedience full of love for the Father, in a spirit of sonship.”*¹¹

The *Petrine principle* as a hierarchical principle is linked to external Church structures. It is related to the institution of the Church in general, and to the objective holiness that characterises Scripture, the sacraments, and the hierarchy, It also includes other elements such as Canon Law. The *Marian principle* is the “subjective” spirit present in Mary, which is lived out in a dynamic way by all those who strive for holiness in the Church.

With regard to the *Petrine principle*, Von Balthasar made five interesting points:

1. The institutional aspect provides a structure that represents Christ as the head of the Body, Christ who is continually present in the Body and who continually brings forth life through the sacraments and the ministries, etc.
2. The institution is the condition necessary for a personal and authentic presence of Christ in the Church. In other words, in order to clearly understand who Christ is, we need to have reference to the structure.
3. The institution provides an objective “rule” to which all must conform.
4. The Petrine principle is instructive since it forms us in the spirit of Christ.
5. In addition, it guarantees the authenticity of the *Marian principle*, which is the prophetic aspect of the living faith of believers.

Afterwards, he specifies several points about the *Marian principle*:

1. The *Marian principle* within the Church is the principle on which the institutional structure is ordered and which endures for all eternity. This means that the structure of the Church is organised on the holiness of the mystical Body and thus on the *Marian principle*. The *Marian principle* endures into eternity while the *Petrine principle*, the institution, will no longer exist in the next life. The Church, viewed from the perspective of the *Marian principle*, is seen primarily as Spouse, a spouse who receives the gift, who responds, collaborates and brings forth life.

2. The *Marian principle* comprises all those who, day after day, respond to God’s love; in other words, all the forms of holiness that exist in the Church.

3. There is a Marian “infallibility” of holiness that exists in parallel to the “Petrine infallibility”. Given the fact that holiness leads to existential understanding of truth, we can speak of a certain “Marian infallibility” which of course is subordinate to the Petrine principle.

¹⁰ Cf. “Penuma e Istituzione” in *Lo Spirito e l’Istituzione*, pp. 173-202.

¹¹ See *Lo Spirito e l’Istituzione*, 199

Von Balthasar borrowed the idea from Newman when he emphasised how much the Marian, universal and prophetic ministry of the Church can enlighten episcopal ministry. He also said that the presence of Mary in the Church...through these charisms...and all spiritual life in the Church can also serve as a guide for bishops. The more that the *Marian principle* is experienced in the Church, the more the *Petrine role* will be supported.

An icon of this Marian principle that supports the ministerial principle, is Therese of Lisieux, patroness of the missions and doctor of the Church. Countless priests owe their vocation to her! And we as women, on numerous occasions have been aware that we are a support to priests when we strive to be like Mary, in responding with love, and in being united with Jesus in his passion and resurrection!

Von Balthasar recognised the truth that there is always a certain “tension” between these two principles in the Church. However, this is a creative tension designed to bring the presence of the oneness of Christ in the unity of the Church. This “tension” should be handled with mutual love.

He added: “*Mary’s vocation came before the vocation of the apostles. Nevertheless, the actual community is founded on the ‘rock’ of the apostle. Once again, however, Peter’s witness of love – ‘Do you love me more than these?’ (Jn 21:15) – presupposes that in this case the principle of the Marian Church (and Johannine) is at work.*”¹²

“The *Petrine principle* has as its purpose to ‘hold together’ and ‘administer’ whereas the *Marian principle* ‘allows things to be’ and ‘promotes freedom’.¹³ If there was nothing but obedience in the Church, as the patriarch Athenagoras I said, this would be a prison. But that’s not the way it is, for there is a Holy Spirit!¹⁴

The best illustration that Von Balthasar used to explain the *Marian principle* and the *Petrine principle* is without doubt the image of the Church as formed by concentric circles, like ripples that come from throwing a pebble into the water. A small circle forms then others of increasing size spread around it. The one that forms last and encompasses all the others is the *Marian principle*, for Mary precedes Peter. The extension of her mission includes all other missions because it extends to the entire Church. The *Marian principle* is therefore fundamental. The circle that comes just before this one is that of Peter, ministry or institution.

Here, I would like to give a testimony from the Focolare Movement. During an audience on September 23rd 1985, Chiara Lubich, the founder of Focolare, asked the Holy Father if he thought it appropriate that the President of the Work of Mary should always be a woman. The vice-president is always a priest. John Paul II responded: “Oh yes, it’s an excellent decision!” And the Holy Father gave a reason for this. He referred to the four profiles of the Church that, according to Von Balthasar, are found in the early Church – Peter, John, Paul and Mary. The Pope declared that they form the Church because the analysis of Von Balthasar is not founded on sociological criteria but theological and ecclesiological ones. So the Pope wholeheartedly agreed that the role of President in the Work of Mary movement should be filled by a woman (Marian principle), above the role of a priest as vice-president

¹² See *Teodrammatica*, Vol. III, pp. 330-331.

¹³ See *Der antirömische Affekt*, 170.

¹⁴ With reference to the tension between Episcopal ministry and prophecy in the Church, see Appendix 3

(Petrine principle). This explanation given by John Paul II is included in our Statutes, in the section that addresses the issue of the President of the Work of Mary.

Von Balthasar invites everyone to become more aware of the Marian principle, that is, the charismatic aspect of holiness in the Church. He wrote: *“Without Mariology, Christianity risks becoming inhuman. The Church risks becoming functionalist, lacking a soul, a relentlessly laborious enterprise, far removed from its true nature of love. A Church such as this will be abandoned by many.”*¹⁵

And again: *“We continually undertake to reform the Church and to adapt it... to the needs of the times, taking into account the criticisms of our adversaries and following our own intuitions. In doing this, however, do we not lose sight of Mary, the prototype of the Church? In our reforms, it seems we should continually hold fast to our views on Mary. This is not, of course, for the purpose of multiplying feasts and devotions or even Marian definitions, but simply in order to learn what the Church is and to authentically discern the ecclesial spirit of something which is otherwise only ecclesiastical playacting.”*¹⁶ In other words, devotions and acts of piety that are sterile.

Von Balthasar mentions, of course, the saints who represent a “living commentary on Scripture, a real and personal interpretation of the Gospel,”¹⁷ helping us to understand how to live this. It is true that the role of the hierarchy is to interpret the revelation of Christ in Scripture, “however, we should not forget the directions that come to us from the Holy Spirit by way of the saints... for the saints are the ‘living Gospel,’¹⁸ the Gospel in action.

Von Balthasar wrote: the saints need to have humility in order to be open to be corrected, formed and judged by the Church. Nevertheless, those who serve in governance in the Church need to have humility in order to allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit of Christ who shines forth in the holiness that is lived out within the Church.

Put simply, the Marian principle is charity: it is the Church who loves. Mary’s influence consists in bringing love to the forefront, through the charisms that she calls forth in union with the Holy Spirit. This allows the Church to be a communion, creating oneness among all of us who are many.

In bringing this brief study to a close, I would like to give an example of someone, a diocesan priest of our Focolare movement, who has really lived out this Marian principle. A month and a half before his death, in speaking to some seminarians with the little strength that still remained, he said the following (his talk was recorded). We can look on it as his testament, which he demonstrated by his life: *“The Marian profile of the Church is the absence of clericalism. This seems important to me: that we prepare for priesthood knowing and hoping that we will be capable of dying for all, of dying to ourselves and for everyone. Extinguish every flame of knowledge and heroics in order to be simply love.”*

¹⁵ See Klarstellungen p.72

¹⁶ Maria nella dottrina nel culto fella Chiesa” in J. Ratzinger e H. U. Von Balthasar, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, (Rome 1981) p.72

¹⁷ „Klarstellungen, 79

¹⁸ Cf. Introduction to *Schwester im Geist* (einsiedeln, 1970) p.14ff [*Sorelle nello Spirito. Teresa di Lisieux e Elisabetta di Digione* (Milano, 1973)

We need to consider the other person, whoever that might be, as someone who is irreplaceable, unique in the world. If you are not capable of loving this other person because he or she is different, you have understood nothing of humanity. The entire Gospel can be summed up in this way: “*Whatever you have done to the least of my brothers or sisters, you have done to me*”... Whatever I do, even to the most despised of this world, I do to Jesus. This is what allows us to shed light into the darkness. Yes, even if the attitude of some person or another does not please me, he or she is still worthy of love.

Obviously, this idea needs to reach the depths of our heart for us to be truly convinced of it. Once convinced of it, it is **THE** discovery, the key to everything. Then we finally understand that, many things can happen. War in all its forms, rivalries, all this is derived from power. Money is power; everything is power...Being in communion saves us and saves everyone.

II MY TESTIMONY TO HOW JOHN PAUL II CARRIED OUT HIS MINISTRY

I can say that I witnessed how willing the recent Popes have been to exercise their Petrine ministry within the broader framework of the Marian dimension, especially in the ecumenical setting with which I am most familiar. Cardinal Willebrands, the “charismatic” founder along with Cardinal Bea, invited me to this Council that Paul VI had intended should take place. This Council also included Father Duprey and Father Blanc. The latter, who became bishop, was also a key figure in the area of ecumenism, since he was part of its origins and undoubtedly the one responsible for the historic meeting that took place between Paul VI and the Patriarch Athenagoras I.

Also, since I lived in the city of Rome for over twenty years, I attended the funeral of Paul VI on August 12th 1978, was present in Saint Peter’s square for the election of John Paul II on October 16th 1978, and crossed paths with the ambulance transporting this same Pope on May 13th, 1981, immediately after the attempt on his life. In short, I was completely immersed in the atmosphere here.

1. PAUL VI AS FORERUNNER

During Paul VI's pontificate, the Marian principle, as Von Balthasar spoke of it, had not yet come to the fore. Nonetheless, Paul VI, with his heavy task of guiding the Church after the Council, lived this principle, first of all in his personal life. We cannot help but be struck by his testament when he said (I quote this from memory): “Do good, at last do God’s will.”

In dialogue with other Christian Churches

Paul VI was involved in works for ecumenism that are considered “prophetic” by Pope Benedict XVI. Through these actions, he seemed to bring back to life the *kenosis* of Jesus: like Jesus, he did not want to cling to the rank of his ministry, his primacy, but rather emptied himself (*kenosis*), lowering himself, becoming obedient to what love requires (the Marian principle), to paraphrase Philippians 2:6 ff.

1. His visit to Athenagoras in Jerusalem: the Pope insisted on going in spite of all kinds of difficulties
2. Lifting of bans of excommunication: December 7th, 1965.

3 On December 14th, 1975, during a ceremony to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the lifting of excommunications, the Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, who was instrumental in the lifting of these excommunications, met Pope Paul VI in the Sistine Chapel. Paul VI made a gesture that astounded all those present. At the conclusion of the celebration, as a sign of reconciliation, the Pope knelt down before the representative of the Orthodox Church and kissed his feet. The comment from the Patriarch of Constantinople was significant: *“This went far beyond words. We were in the very realm of the Logos. In the Reign of God, the one who is first must become the last of all and the servant of all.”* And the Patriarch Dimitrios I added: *“It would be impossible for anyone, Christian or not, and above all ourselves as ecumenical Patriarchs, to overlook the significance of this spontaneous gesture. This was unprecedented in the history of the Church. His Holiness Pope Paul VI, at the moment of the Eucharistic celebration, prostrated himself to kiss the feet of our representative, aware that at this moment, the Metropolitan represented all Orthodoxy.”*

We consider this great action carried out by His Holiness to be a prolongation of the Tradition of the Bishops and the Fathers of the undivided Church. This act of humility has had excellent results in rebuilding relationships.” *“By this action, our venerable and beloved brother, the Pope of Rome, Paul VI, has gone beyond acting as Pope and proved to the Church and the entire world who he is and who he can be: a Christian bishop and, above all, the first bishop of Christianity, the bishop of Rome, namely, a reconciling and unifying power for the Church and the world.”*¹⁹

4. The fisherman’s ring (papal ring) was given to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, on March 23rd, 1966 in the Sistine Chapel. Paul VI asked the Archbishop for his ring and placed it on his finger, and then he gave him his own (the ring of Peter).

2. John-Paul II

In his personal life

One key to understanding the pontificate of John Paul II could be the way he lived his ministry within the broader framework of the Marian principle. Not only did he understand this principle; he wanted to promote it in the Church. He was open to God’s gifts to the very end, even the gift of his illness. What was fascinating not just for Christians but for the entire world was this dimension of love, of his response to the gift of God that he received even to the point of kenosis. Certain unforgettable images that expressed this idea will remain ever before our eyes: how he showed the love and charity of the Church.

In his work for ecumenism

Without a doubt, John Paul II was aware that his ministry, a gift from God with a view to unity in the Church, was, in fact, an obstacle to unity, a ministry that divides.

Let us look at his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995). John Paul II, first emphasised his clear awareness that the ministry of the bishop of Rome is to promote unity, that he is the *servus servorum Dei*. He then affirmed his clear understanding that what should be an impetus for unity is, on the contrary, an obstacle to unity: *“a difficulty for most other Christians”* (n° 88). He was encouraged, though, by the fact that other Churches and ecclesial

¹⁹ Quoted in http://infocatho.cef.fr/fichiers-html/oecumenisme/unitesemaine/02_moscou/02

communities “are more and more taking a fresh look at this ministry of unity” (n° 89). He also touched on the delicate topic of infallibility as a servant of unity (n° 94), while adding, “All this however must always be done in communion. When the Catholic Church affirms that the office of the Bishop of Rome corresponds to the will of Christ, she does not separate this office from the mission entrusted to the whole body of Bishops, who are also ‘vicars and ambassadors of Christ’. The Bishop of Rome is a member of the ‘College’, and the Bishops are his brothers in the ministry.” (n° 95). The Pope made reference, as well, to the first millennium, in which “the primacy exercised its office of unity.” (ibid) And he added the remarkable words that he had said before to the Patriarch Dimitrios I: “insistently pray the Holy Spirit to shine his light upon us, enlightening all the Pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we may seek—together, of course—the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognised by all concerned” (ibid). He also offered other prophetic signs: Assisi 1986, the Way of the Cross in the Coliseum, for which he asked Christians from other denominations to prepare the meditation!

Another example is the opening of the Holy Door of Saint Paul Outside the Walls on January 18th 2000 with two representatives from the two Churches, the Orthodox Metropolitan Athanasios and the Anglican Archbishop George Carey. And very many other signs...

3. THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is an organisation that serves the Pope in promoting a climate of friendship with other Churches and ecclesial communities. It has been working for unity for over 40 years. The first step is ecumenism in life: praying together, having meals together, and developing friendship. The Pontifical Council is a place of friendship. It is always possible to find fault with one or other definition of faith. When friendship is part of it, however, things are different, and every effort is made to seek agreement

Dialogues undertaken

With how many Churches is the Pontifical Council involved in dialogue? The following Churches and worldwide Communion:

- Orthodox Church
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Malankara Orthodox Church
- Anglican Communion
- Lutheran World Federation
- World Methodist Council
- Baptist World Alliance
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Leaders of some Pentecostal Churches

Think of the many reciprocal visits that have been made and Christological agreements have been signed, as well as other declarations! We can note the *Joint Declaration of the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification*, signed in Augsburg in 1999. This is a joyful sign that has had significant consequences.

The real stumbling block, however, is the Petrine ministry, all the more so since the changes that have taken place in the Latin Church concluding with the proclamation, in the First Vatican Council, of the infallibility of the Pope.

Let us look at the positive points:

For the Lutherans, the Pope is no longer the antichrist, one who prevents the Gospel from being proclaimed. They have even expressed the need for a certain ministry of unity. The Protestants themselves are in a federation: the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Ecumenical World Council of Churches.

Little by little (also as a result of globalisation) there is a growing awareness of the universality of the Church, and this has created a new order: there is a sense of a need for a centre, a pivotal point.

The personality of recent Popes who have lived and preached the Gospel and have not been an obstacle to it.

John Paul II's invitation to seek together a way to exercise this ministry (not its substance which cannot change) received very favourable feedback. All were interested in it, and it was a topic of official dialogues.

Common agreements resulting from ecumenical dialogues

1. There is a new openness, a different atmosphere. All the bishops or leaders of other Churches go to Rome at the invitation of the Pope. They are all very proud to be there. Rome has become an ecumenical point of reference, an ecumenical centre. Fifty years ago, that would have been absolutely impossible. Protestant bishops are present even at the creation of new cardinals. The climate is no longer the same and this is already a significant step.

Discussion from the standpoint of biblical foundations has also changed. Today, exegetes of various denominations use the same scientific methods. All agree that the apostle Peter had a purpose, a special role among the apostles. It is undeniable; he was the first, the spokesman for the others, the first apostle to whom Jesus Christ appeared after his resurrection. The expression: "Peter and the apostles" can be found in the oldest texts that exist. This is very important; he was the first witness, the first one to be sent, the leader of the community in Jerusalem.

In addition there are the classic texts such as Matthew 16: "You are Rock..." or John 21: "Tend my sheep." There is a tradition from the New Testament about the role of Peter that goes beyond his historical life. Everyone is in agreement with this, about this foundation. The problem that remains, however, is to know if there are personal successors and if the Petrine ministry must be linked to the bishop of Rome. Certainly, the Lutherans say: if we reflect on the Petrine ministry in a theological way and restate the principle, we can envisage this.. Some go so far as to say it is even desirable.

2. Everyone desires communion with Peter, but not to be subject to Peter. They do not want to have someone who interferes in their Churches, who has jurisdiction. Even the

Orthodox Christians have said that there should be a head at the universal level. Cardinal Kasper said that he had the impression that everyone in the Christian world sensed the promise that is contained in the Petrine ministry, the chair of Peter presiding in love and charity, and which has become a centre of ecumenism. Nevertheless, not every problem has been resolved.

3. Infallibility: a difficulty, but it needs to be properly understood.

4. The Petrine service or ministry: We have to go back to the Bible. This is a service, not a power. The Pope himself defines himself as *the servant of the servants of God*. Sometimes, as testimony shows, this service even results in martyrdom. Today, the Pope shows a change of style. He is not the same as Popes were 50 years ago. He has a sense of humour, and is brotherly and evangelical in his approach.

Conclusion

In conclusion, may I quote a text from our founder, Chiara Lubich, which may help us to revive this “Marian principle” in our daily life and to bring our own stone to contribute to the building of the Church so that it may become more and more “the house and the school of communion.”

I went into a church one day, and with my heart full of trust, I asked Jesus: ‘*Why did you choose to remain on earth, in every place and time, in the precious Eucharist, and you who are God, did not invent some way of also leaving us Mary, our Mother, for all of us who are on the journey of faith?*’ In the silence, Jesus seemed to respond: “*I did not leave her here, because I wanted to find her in you. Even though you are not immaculate, my love will make you virginal. And you, all of you, will open your motherly arms and hearts to humanity, to those who always, thirst for God and for God’s Mother. It is up to you now to soothe the suffering, to bind up the wounds, to wipe away the tears. Sing her litanies and strive to be a reflection of them.*” (Pensée et spiritualité - Thoughts and Spirituality, Paris 2003)

WITH THE FOUNDERS IN OUR DAY

Province of Nigeria

Working with street children in Kumasi, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Ghana is situated on West Africa’s Gulf of Guinea, just a few degrees North of the Equator. The climate is tropical, the eastern coastal belt is warm and comparatively dry; the south west corner, hot and humid; and the north, hot and dry. Ghana is estimated to have over 23,832,495 people as at July 2009, with its capital city at Accra.

The changes in trading routes from the north to coastal Ghana during the colonial period denied the north trading activities. The slave trade and sourcing of labour for the mines and cocoa farms and plantation also denied the region manpower to till the land. The

economic activity of the people in the north was thereby reduced to very low-key trading and subsistence farming which only provided food for the family and not much extra income. Despite the gains in recent economic growth in Ghana, income inequality across regions, between men and women has increased during this period of accelerated growth. Kumasi is the capital of the Ashanti Region, the second largest city in Ghana with an estimated population of 3,187,907 people. It is situated in the middle of the rain forest about 100 miles from the coast and from Ghana's capital Accra. Ashanti region produces most of the country's cocoa, minerals, and timber.

On the streets of Kumasi there are young adults and children who migrate from the Northern part of Ghana. They flood in and work for long hours just to make ends meet; they have difficulty finding shelter and food if they do not work. The majority of them survive on the meagre amount of money earned as load carriers (Kayayos). There are thousands of children on the streets of Kumasi, although no official count has been made. Christ is present in these vulnerable street children our true Masters.

The Daughters of Charity arrived in Kumasi in 2003 from the Province of Nigeria in West Africa in response to the invitation of the Archbishop Peter Spong the then Archbishop of Kumasi to address the problems of displaced and homeless young women and their children who migrate from the Northern part of Ghana to Kumasi in search of greener pastures. So two sisters (Sr. Agatha & Sr. Perpetua) arrived in Kumasi in December 2003 to undertake a feasibility study. After carefully studying the situation and the plight of the children who roam around the streets without any future, the Province accepted the project because "Christ was there waiting for them to serve in the Street of Kumasi in Ghana – West Africa". The Project is managed by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul from the Province of Nigeria. It was officially launched in June 2005 by Most Rev. Peter Sarpong, the then Catholic Archbishop of Kumasi.

The Sisters are currently running a Drop-in-centre for street boys and girls, two crèches for the little children, a 'listening centre' for child victims in prostitution and an outreach programme for street children in Kumasi and its environs. Almost all street children on the streets of Kumasi come from the Northern Region. People from the Northern Part of Ghana are poor, and many children who live there never see inside a classroom. The children who live in this part of Ghana are driven to do something about their situation, and are often trafficked to the streets of Kumasi in the belief that they will be able to earn money easily in the city and then return with their earnings either to go back to school or to get married. The reality in the streets of Kumasi is quite different: Children work for long hours as caretakers or porters carrying heavy loads. More than 26,000 immigrant children try to make a living here. When they fail to do this they are drawn into drug trafficking and child prostitution.

Our Mission objective is to address the reality of young people on the streets by reaching out to help them explore other options in life. We take special care to help young children working on the streets as shoe-shines, assistant drivers, water sellers or young prostitutes. The street children have their own culture and they can only be reached through this culture. We try to understand this culture by building up a relationship of trust with them. By becoming their friends we are able to become the friends of the other members of their families.

The activities of this Project are carried out in two main areas; on the streets and in the reception centre.

On the streets

Working with a team of social workers, we offer the children and young people a basic education: reading, writing and numeracy as well as training in hygiene, social and economic matters and we provide information on the dangers that beset them: trafficking, drugs, AIDS and prostitution. We help youngsters under the age of eighteen who choose to give up living on the streets in favour of a more stable way of life by visiting their families.

We offer a service that is adapted to the capabilities of young adults who show that they are able to take responsibility for resuming their studies and following training courses. For young mothers living on the streets we offer twice-weekly evening classes and basic care. We look after their young children aged between two and six in two creches: the first of these can take in 45 children and the second, 50. Every morning Sister Martha and other members of staff from both creches go to the market to collect the children and take them to the creches.

At the Centre

The Centre offers children and young people accompaniment and support as well as a safe place to relax, play and learn. It organises short training courses with adult support and also organises programmes aimed at sensitising the public and giving them information about the plight of these children.

It is difficult to gauge the success of this Project in terms of quick results because the problem is so wide-ranging. At the end of the year 2009 there were 86 young children in the creches. At the moment, 60 children have schooling, attending primary school or college. 28 young people now have a trade and 55 young mothers are attending evening classes. Many children have returned to their families and many sick children have benefited from hospital treatment.

The Programme also allows us to follow up all the children in our care. We make sure that the families are aware of the help we give each child and that they agree to help them. This follow-up means we have to visit the families as well as the schools and training centres where the children are enrolled. A Sister goes with a member of staff to make sure the children are well treated and that their visits to the family take place. For example, in an effort to reintegrate a girl into her family, we decided to send her to a boarding school. One day she went to the market to buy things she needed for school and she saw Sister Pauline who did all she could to reconcile the girl with her family so that she would have somewhere to go during the holidays even if she found that difficult. In fact, she ran away from the house because she couldn't stand any longer the difficult conditions imposed by her stepmother.

How these children evangelise us!

Working every day with these children, we are struck by their acceptance of their situation and their ability to put up with all kinds of insults and continue working. They make us think of the Child Jesus and his vulnerability. These children are vulnerable and yet they accept their difficult situation. Do we accept every situation in which we find ourselves?

They make us think of the passage from the Gospel which says, “*Do not worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. Surely life means more than food, and the body more than clothing. Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?*” (Mt 6, 25-26). Divine Providence is at work in the lives of our children and in our lives, too.

We are ready to give all the help we can to these children so that they may have a future because we see Christ in them and the charity of Jesus Christ crucified impels us to act. Every day we bring these children before God in prayer and we pray for the grace to work with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow to relieve the suffering of those who live on the streets.

Sister Josephine OKWORI.

Daughter of Charity

Community of Kentinkrono, in Kumasi (Ghana)

SISTERS’ TESTIMONIES

Province of Congo Congo

“For he saves the poor when they cry and the needy who are helpless” ” (Ps 72)

Access to medical care is an ongoing struggle for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo and particularly in our city of Mbandaka.

Clarisse, a young mother aged twenty-five, is joyfully waiting for the birth of her second child. She comes regularly to the hospital for her prenatal checkups. In the eighth month of her pregnancy, she is hospitalised with malaria. On her second day in hospital, two physicians examine her and make a presumptive diagnosis: *foetal distress or death in utero*. They decide to perform an emergency caesarean section.

In Clarisse’s presence, the two physicians begin to discuss the cost of the operation. She is surprised and worried. Then, the order for the operation to go ahead is given. The midwife begins to prepare Clarisse for surgery, and places a urinary catheter in her. Suddenly, Clarisse cries out: “Please, I don’t want this operation. My baby is alive, not dead! Look at how it’s moving!”

Courageously, Clarisse climbs off the delivery table, holding onto the urinary catheter, and stands up. Seeing how insistent she is, the two physicians call in a third doctor. After examining her, he orders an echography. The results conclude: “the foetus is alive and childbirth can take place in one month.” Clarisse asks for the catheter to be removed immediately.

Without wasting any time, she leaves the hospital and returns home. The following day, she confides to Sister Adrienne: “I placed myself in God’s hands and asked that his will be done. Sister, I’m convinced that the good Lord had pity on me because He hears the cries

of those who are poor and suffering.” Afterwards, her mother returns to the hospital to pay her hospital bill and to gather her belongings.

Sister Adrienne reassures Clarisse, admiring the strength of her faith and the witness she has given of her clear understanding of things. She invites Clarisse to pray for all the health care workers, all sick people who lack good care, and those who die because they do not receive the care they need.

A month later, Clarisse gives birth to a beautiful baby boy. That day, tears of joy cover her face and her heart is filled with happiness. She praises the Author of Life and her entire family gives thanks to the Lord for this wonder. Clarisse has had the experience of passing from suffering to joy. From a foetus that had been declared dead has come baby Ephraim, fully alive and in excellent health. He is now three months old.

This is just one example among many! God is watching over us! Let us pray to Him that the needs of our people will be met, especially in the domain of health care.

Sisters of the Province

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

A daughter of Charity

“Righteous among the nations”

CEREMONY TO AWARD THE MEDAL OF “RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS”

On **Tuesday, May 11th 2010** the title “Righteous among the Nations” was awarded posthumously to Sister Anne-Cecile Ardoin, Daughter of Charity.

This ceremony took place at the Motherhouse on rue du Bac in Paris, bringing together about one hundred members of the French Committee for Yad Vashem, in the presence of the Chief Rabbis Haim Korsia and Alain Goldman, along with Mr. Grobart, Vice-President of the French Committee for Yad Vashem, and Madame Madeleine Kahn, who, as a child, was saved by Sister Anne-Cecile Ardouin.

In her memory, and to honour her essential role in saving the life of a Jewish girl, a Certificate and Medal of “Righteous Among the Nations” for Sister Anne-Cecile Ardouin, who is deceased, were received by Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, accompanied by two Sisters from Romania. It was a very moving moment of remembrance and solidarity.

The title “Righteous among the Nations” is accorded by the Righteous Commission of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to persons who, at the risk of their own lives, have saved Jewish people during the Occupation.

WHO WAS THIS JEWISH GIRL?

Madeleine Woloch lived in the 3rd arrondissement of Paris with her parents. Her father, Abraham, was of Polish descent, and her mother, Rosa, was born in Romania; both were Jewish and were merchants. Madeleine was born in 1933.

When Madeleine was 6 years old, her mother was about to give birth. Madeleine went to stay at her grandmother's home in Stanesti-de-Jos in Bucovine, Romania. Two months later on August 23rd 1939, because of the German-Soviet Alliance, the Romanian borders were closed and Madeleine could not return to France. Once the German troops entered Romania, the Jews were massacred and her uncle in Stanesti-de-Jos was assassinated. Madeleine, her grandmother, her aunt and her one-year-old son survived. They were captured and deported to Transnistrie, to the east of Dniepr. They were forced to move from camp to camp in what the Romanian officials called "forced migration," without food or drink, not knowing their exact destination. After days of walking they reached the camp at Cernivitsi. Here the grandmother died of tuberculosis.

Since Madeleine was born in Paris, she was a French national and held a French passport. In 1942, with the help of the French consul in Galatz, M. Gabriel Richard, Madeleine was taken from the camp and repatriated to the French diplomatic mission in Romania. Now 9 years old, she had typhus and her health was very fragile. She was taken to the hospital in Galatz run by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. Sister Ardoin, Sister Servant of the Community, cared for her and gave her special attention and much affection to try to make her forget the nightmare she had been living through.

About three years later, Sister Ardouin was called back to France. This was a new suffering for Madeleine who felt like an "orphan" at the hospital in Galatz. Some time afterward, Madeleine returned to Bucharest with the rest of the Daughters of Charity from the hospital. She went to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion under an assumed identity, but lived in constant fear of being found out.

In 1946, after the end of World War II, Madeleine was able to rejoin her parents in France. After so many years apart, their reunion was difficult. Their lives had been shattered by too many hardships. It was a long road to recovery; Madeleine even had to re-learn French.

After a difficult school experience and re-adaptation into her family, Madeleine went on to study medicine.. She has continued in this profession for the last 27 years. She also studied for a DEA in History (Degree in Advanced Studies) at the Sorbonne in order to better understand her past. She never forgot Sister Ardoin's support and understanding following her horrific life in the camps.

LETTER OF GRATITUDE FROM MADELEINE KAHN

Two days after the ceremony, Sister Evelyne Franc received this letter from Madeleine Kahn:

Dear Sister Evelyne,

For many years, I have thought about all the affection that Mother Ardouin lavished on me, although I didn't know how to express my gratitude to her. A visit to Yad-Vashem gave me the idea of the Medal of the Righteous. I won't go into the details of the process required for this recognition for being rescued, but ever since, my days have been filled with dreams about awarding this medal. Nevertheless, "we don't act on our own...in order to proceed we have to go through others." And this is why I approached you, Sister Evelyne, not without some hesitation. Your generous welcome removed all my fears. The ceremony of May 11th served only to reinforce my first impression. The simplicity, goodness and generosity that you and all the Sisters extended to us will always be a fond memory for me. How can I ever express my gratitude for such a warm welcome? Thank you is such a small word, and I have so much that I would like to express. Of course, I could have telephoned you, but a phone call is as brief as the word thanks, and I have always been better at writing than at speaking. Bernard Grasset said: "Happiness is not sought, but rather found." On May 11th, I found it in your midst, with you, the Sisters, my family and my friends. For all this, I thank you, Sister.

*Yours respectfully,
Madeleine Kahn*

P.S. Please give my affectionate greetings to all the Sisters, especially the Sisters from Romania

SISTER'S TESTIMONIES

Province of Thailand

10 years of the Daughters of Charity's presence in Laos

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND LOCATION OF THE COUNTRY

The People's Democratic Republic (RDP) of Laos is a country with a total land area of 236,800 sq. km and a population of 6,368,481 with a subsistence-level agriculture based economy. Laos PDR shares borders with China in the north, Cambodia in the south, Vietnam in the east, Thailand in the west and Myanmar in the northwest. The Mekong River flows through almost the entire length of the country from north to south.

Most of the poor people belong to the ethnic minority groups who often live in remote areas that are difficult to access and depend on unstable livelihoods. The quality of life remains low and poor. The disruption during the civil war and the economic stagnation policies of the early years of the Laos PDR, notably the attempt to collectivise agriculture, resulted in economic stagnation. In 1980, however, the government began to pursue more pragmatic policies and in 1986 introduced market-oriented reforms. Subsequently, private enterprises have been allowed to operate on every level and foreign investments have been encouraged.

Since its membership of ASEAN in 1997, the country's door has opened to receive help from other countries. A good number of non-government organisations have been assisting the government, mainly in the areas of urban and rural development, public health and education. Vientiane, the capital city, is quickly progressing and is continually hosting many ASEAN meetings and conferences.

THE CHURCH SITUATION

The Jesuits and the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP) began the evangelisation of the kingdom of Laos in 17th century but this was not successful. In 1880, MEP priests managed to enter the country from Bangkok, Thailand, with their "Mission of Laos" which covered the territories along the two banks of the Mekong river. At their invitation other religious congregations came to the country: Lovers of the Cross of Christ (1922), Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret (1934), Oblates of Mary Immaculate Fathers (1935) and the Lay Institute of Missionary of Mary Immaculate Oblates (1957). Over the years, missionary work continued to spread and priestly and religious vocations increased steadily. The mission of evangelisation was carried out mostly through pastoral work, education, health and social services, apostolic presence to the hill tribes, inter-religious dialogue, translation of liturgical books, the Holy Scripture and works on Formation.

When the Communists took over in 1975, the government confiscated almost all the people's possessions and works of evangelisation declined. Foreign missionaries were killed, some were threatened and forced to leave the country. After that, vocations to priestly and religious life became scarce and ongoing formation for priests and religious stopped. Catholic believers feared for their lives if they professed their faith and they were deprived of spiritual and pastoral assistance.

In 2007, there were about 45,000 Catholics, 4 bishops, 14 priests, 29 seminarists and 5 Religious Congregations, 3 of which were diocesan.

THE MISSION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY IN LAOS

The presence of the Daughters of Charity in Laos PDR began when Sr. Julma Neo, accompanied by Sr. Josefina Estremera, visited Laos for visa purposes. While in Laos, Sr. Julma was approached by a Sister of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret, who told her about their need to learn the English language. Sr. Julma took this opportunity to help the Sisters and in January 1998, the Philippine Province sent Sr. Adelfa Siega to teach English to the Sisters. Not only did she teach English but she also started simple activities for a group of young people in coordination with catechists and others involved in the church. After a year of crossing the friendship bridge that connects Laos and Thailand, Bishop. Jean - Khamse Vithavong, OMI, of the diocese of Vientiane noticed the initiatives made by Sr. Adelfa and asked her to help in his diocese. She advised the bishop to write a letter to Sr. Teresa Mabasa, Visitatrice

On June 21st 1999, Sr. Corazon and Sr. Maria Jesusa were sent to Vientiane. On 27th June the DC Community was established and a contract was drawn up between the Diocese and the Daughters of Charity where the Sisters were asked to serve:

- Elderly and sick persons, through a community based programme which assists them in their spiritual, pastoral and health needs.

- Young people, to train them to take responsibility for being agents of change and development, using holistic and service-oriented ongoing formation with a view to gaining professional qualifications. The programme also assists 2 other dioceses in the formation of youth groups.
- Women and couples, through a community-based programme that provides general training, helping them to join a cooperative that would provide them with a living. This programme gave rise to the *Project for Children's Development* which provides educational assistance, food supplements for malnourished and sick children as well as other educational activities.
- the Filipino Migrants. To respond to the needs and problems of migrants especially in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos.

The arrival of the Daughters of Charity in Laos was providential and historical. They were the first religious missionaries who entered Laos after 1975. The inconvenience of the delay in getting a visa for Sr. Julma was undoubtedly part of God's plan and providence.

Today the seeds of the Vincentian Charism have sprouted, grown and spread their roots to several villages and dioceses, giving rise to services that address multiple problems, especially poverty.

The Sisters have also become accustomed to the present situation and feelings of fear, uncertainty and insecurity have become normal and part of daily life. The need to be prudent and keep a "low key" profile in their life and mission has, however, enhanced their creativity and resourcefulness, in view of the limitations and the "do's and don'ts" set by the government.

CELEBRATION OF THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY

To commemorate the 10th year of the Daughters of Charity's presence in Laos, a series of ongoing formation and activities was organised and these came to a close on December 28th 2009. The Sisters gathered at a Eucharistic celebration presided over by bishop Jean-Khamse Vithavong, and concelebrated by Fr. Danilo Abogado, CM, Provincial Director, Fr. Benakhone Inthirath, Parish Priest, and 3 other Priests from Thailand and was graced by the presence of Sr. Josefina Estremera, Visitatrice, Sisters who came from Thailand, Filipino friends and other parishioners.

In his homily, His Excellency Mgr. Jean- Khamse Vithavong thanked the Daughters of Charity for their great contribution to the Church of Laos, particularly through the developmental programmes for the poor, especially the sick and elderly, the women, the young people and the migrants. He also thanked the Ambassador and the staff of the Philippine Embassy and the Filipinos living in Laos for supporting the Sisters and their mission. After lunch, a simple power point presentation helped the viewers understand the simple and humble beginnings of the Daughters of Charity in Laos. Dances, songs and drama were then presented and these added to the joy and beauty of the celebration. The Bishop also presented some gifts as an expression of his gratitude.

The 10th anniversary of the presence of the Daughters of Charity in Laos brought to mind what St. Vincent said about the foundation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity: *"I did not think of it, neither did Mademoiselle Le Gras."* He went on to say: *„Where there are poor persons, there will have to be Daughters of Charity."*

VINCENTIAN FAMILY TESTIMONY

Mother House, 29th -31st January 2010

16th Meeting of the International Leaders of the Vincentian Family

The 16th Meeting of the International Leaders of the Vincentian Family took place at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris from January 29th-31st 2010. In the context of celebrating the 350th anniversary of the death of the Founders, Father Gregory Gay invited other members of General Councils of other branches as well as the leaders of the major branches (AIC, CM, DC, SSVP, JMV, AAM, Misevi). Other groups included representatives of Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, Federation of the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg, Federation of the Sisters of Charity of North America, and the Congregation of the Brothers of Mercy.

In the first part of the meeting, two speakers presented an aspect of the personality and life of our two Founders. Later, the invited members of two more recent branches of the Vincentian Family presented the history of their Congregation and their current apostolates. Finally, several members of other branches of the Family gave an overview of how they strive to live the creative and dynamic spirit of the Vincentian charism in their apostolates in today's world.

PRESENTATION ON THE FOUNDERS

With the aim of deepening our understanding of our charism, two conferences about our Founders were presented.

Saint Louise de Marillac

Sr. Antoinette-Marie Hance, DC, shared with us her understanding of and deep admiration for Saint Louise, and the fruit of her studies on the saint's life. She explained how Louise marvelled at God's Loving plan for humanity, and said that God continues to make use of our life journeys to reveal his Love. Sister invited us to draw closer to Saint Louise from three perspectives, which she developed in her presentation:

In the first part she sketched the life of Saint Louise in two different periods: the first 35 years of her life that were marked by "*an experience of poverty in the fundamental events of her life*" and the last 34 years, or "*the miracle of the servant of God*" showing the action of God in Louise's life and her commitment to the service of the poor.

The second part presented a beautiful example of her collaboration: the work for the foundlings. Sister Antoinette-Marie explained that she chose this example of service, not only because of its significance and because the beginnings of this work were difficult, but

also to show us how the Saint was able to encourage and coordinate collaboration among many different institutions from the highest to the most ordinary levels of society and coordinate the setting up of new Institutions.

In the third part of her presentation Sister revealed the secret of Louise's work as a collaborator: she was completely at one with God's will and His Loving Plan for the poor to be put into effect. In a certain sense, the heart of Christ took over Louise's heart. In this part of her presentation, she shared with us the major aspects of Louise's spirituality: seeking the Will of God, contemplating the Trinity and the Word made flesh, contemplating the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, the Virgin Mary as God's masterpiece and the Eucharist which sums up everything.

This presentation by Sr. Antoinette-Marie was much appreciated and it was followed by a time for sharing in language groups and group summaries. Many of those taking part said they had discovered Louise de Marillac from a new angle: she was a highly-talented woman, excellent organiser and administrator. She was a close collaborator of Vincent de Paul and the Ladies of Charity, and was animated by a deep spiritual life. Her life and works are an example for us.

Saint Vincent de Paul today

Fr. Robert Maloney, with his wealth of experience, began his conference with the most outstanding aspects of "Horizon shifts in the last fifty years". In line with the changes that have come about in the Church since the Second Vatican Council we have moved on from talking about the "Double Family of Saint Vincent" (Vincentian priests and Daughters of Charity) to the "Vincentian Family", a term that encompasses all the branches, with collaborative projects and activities. There is a shift from predominantly European ideas and customs to an international Vincentian Family that appreciates the ideas and customs of other continents. Finally, we have moved away from an attitude of giving assistance to an approach of working with poor persons so that they become agents of their own promotion.

In the part entitled "Saint Vincent in his day", Father Maloney spoke of the rich personality of Saint Vincent, highlighting his "filial relationship with his Father" which allowed him to unite contemplation with action, and "his charity towards the neighbour", which led to the praise he received at his funeral when it was said that he "had practically changed the face of the Church".

In speaking about "Saint Vincent today", Fr. Maloney expressed his hopes for our Vincentian Family: that we may be contemplatives in action, that we continue to increase collaboration for the evangelisation and promotion of poor persons, that we remain close to poor people and their struggle for justice, that we be inventive in putting into practice Systemic Change in our projects and also be involved in sowing seeds of peace. He concluded his presentation by inviting us to be passionate for the poor and for justice.

In the reports given after the group work, some horizon shifts that were noted, in addition to those from Fr. Maloney, included the strong awareness of belonging to the Vincentian Family and effective collaboration in common projects. With regard to aspects of Vincent's personality, some highlighted the fact that Vincent was adviser to important figures in his day; he followed Divine Providence and made efforts to eliminate the causes of poverty. Hopes for the Vincentian Family included the desire to experience with the same

intensity on the local level what was experienced at this Meeting, and that we work together in the promotion of justice with all the branches united while respecting our diversity.

PRESENTATION OF TWO NEW BRANCHES OF THE FAMILY

Two invited guests, who are part of the Vincentian Family, presented the history of their Congregation, their charism and their current apostolates.

Sisters of Our Lady Mother of Mercy

Their origins date back to 1832 when a young and energetic priest, Johannes Zwijsen, saw the living conditions of his parishioners in the industrial city of Tilburgo (Netherlands). He founded the Sisters of Our Lady Mother of Mercy initially to educate young girls, and later they also become involved in care of the sick and the elderly. In 1844 he founded the Brothers of Mercy Congregation to take care of young boys.

Taking Our Lady of Mercy as their patroness, J. Zwijsen developed the first Rules which were inspired by St. Vincent de Paul, whom he greatly admired. At the death of the founder in 1877, the number of Sisters was 1,426. In addition to their presence in Holland, in the 19th century the congregation extended into Belgium, Great Britain, United States and Indonesia. In the 20th century they became established in Zimbabwe, Germany, Brazil and the Philippines. There are currently 750 Sisters.

The Sisters' apostolates include day and boarding schools, orphanages, hospitals, residences for elderly persons, caring for persons with disabilities, and parish ministry. Their focus in all their areas of work is to defend the causes of the most poor, ensuring adequate education and setting up social service projects. The Sisters strive to collaborate with the laity in order to ensure the continuity of their service to poor people. Recently, the Congregation has rediscovered Saint Vincent, and his spirituality continues to be a source of inspiration for them. They are also linked with other congregations that follow the Vincentian charism.

The Brothers of Charity

Until the 19th century, persons with psychiatric conditions were rejected from society and confined to what was called asylums. In Gante, Belgium, psychiatric patients were imprisoned in what was called the Castle of the Devil, damp and cold dungeons without any care provided for them.

In 1815, a priest named Fr. Pedro Jose Triest, who had founded the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity in 1811, freed the psychiatric patients from their chains in the Castle of the Devil, and the Brothers of Charity began to care for them. This event proved to be a sign; for the first time persons with psychiatric conditions were being treated like human beings and given care and affection. The Brothers implemented other initiatives in other places, with children living on the streets, with those with incurable diseases. Ten years after their foundation, Pedro Jose Triest, with his Brothers of Charity, chose the following as defining services for the Congregation: care of the elderly, persons with psychiatric illnesses, and those with disabilities. He placed the Congregation under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul.

In 1860, the Brothers became established in Canada, and in 1911 they began their

service in South Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, Indonesia, Peru, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. Today the Congregation numbers about 600 members and serves in 30 countries. Fr. Triest is known as the “Vincent de Paul of Belgium”.

CARRYING OUT THE APOSTOLATE IN DYNAMIC AND CREATIVE WAYS TODAY

Several branches present at the meeting presented examples of their apostolate that demonstrate the creativity and dynamism of the charism in contemporary society.

THE AIC (International Association of Charities)

The AIC members of Puebla, Mexico, have been working with a group of elderly persons with visual disabilities since 2007. Once a week, the group gathers with an AIC member to share on the Gospel of that week and to reflect on their service experiences.

The AIC members from Italy developed a protocol in 2008 in collaboration with the Department of Minors in the Ministry of Justice, with the aim of working to help reintegrate young people between the ages of 14 and 21 who were being released from prison. In Sicily, the AIC have welcomed young people who have been sent by the Centre of Juvenile Justice, and involve them in service to people with disabilities.

THE VINCENTIANS (Congregation of the Mission)

The community in Xirrundzo, Mozambique, comprises five priests and one brother who minister in three parishes. They are involved in helping and accompanying persons with AIDS, education programmes for orphans, chaplaincy at the Carmelo Hospital, and administration of the Vice-Province’s Livestock Project and service in the Centre for Human Promotion called “Rebirth into Hope.”

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

In 2006 the Daughters of Charity arrived in Masanga, Tanzania, at the invitation of the bishop, to collaborate in small communities in the areas of health care, education and parish ministry. The Community includes Sisters from USA, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The small dispensary has now been transformed into a hospital, and has the resources to allow it to begin preparations for the DREAM Project, in collaboration with the Community of Sant Egidio. Promotion of women is another very important and much needed work. The long-term goal is to address social justice themes, especially with regard to women and children. In order to deal with the problem of female genital mutilation, the Sisters, with the support of the local bishop and in agreement with the local authorities and the parents of 53 young girls, developed a programme for an alternative rite of initiation. The young women and their parents are proud of the project and aware that they are experiencing a change that has made history

THE SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

Since 1990, “ the Nowra Farm in New South Wales, Australia, has provided numerous rehabilitation services for persons who suffer from psychological disorders or addictions, with the aim of helping them rebuild their lives. The project can accommodate twelve persons, and most remain for about three months. Medical and psychological services

are provided. There are five buildings, the largest of which is a residence in which each person has his own bedroom. Each resident participates as much as he can and in various ways to the functioning of the project

Federation of the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg (comprising 14 Congregations)

Their ministry is in health care, working in institutions using advanced technology, with commitment to bioethical research and in an organisation that is dealing with serious economic pressures. The current context poses serious questions about human dignity: What hospital has the right to refuse to perform abortions paid for by social security? Who is safeguarding the dignity of dying persons?

For the last ten years, the Sisters have been involved in a process of formation and reflection with the laity. They have formed three groups: General Superiors, Sister Collaborators, and Directors of the Institutions. This has led to the development of a “Charter of Values” to be implemented in the hospital community, with the purpose of defending the dignity of persons from the beginning to the end of their lives.

Federation of the Sisters of Charity of North America

The twelve Congregations in the Federation have started a collaborative mission in New Orleans, where the poor people have not yet been able to recover from the disaster of Hurricane Katrina. The lack of professionals in health care, social services and education is made up for by short-term volunteers. In the “House of Charity” a space is provided for them for apostolic reflection. The Sisters of the Federation coordinate the activities of the volunteers and provide a variety of services in collaboration with other members of the Vincentian Family.

Congregation of the Brothers of Mercy

Brother Linus Schousten and his team of five full-time and two part-time workers bring hope and joy to those housed in 96 prisons in Kenya. The organisation has been providing this service since 1984, organising libraries, conducting exams, distributing personal hygiene items, and arranging sports activities. The prisons are extremely overcrowded, with a population three times the capacity of the prisons, so inmates have to take it in turn to sleep. There is a high level of corruption.

One of the most important features of the project is that it enables prisoners to follow courses at primary, secondary and professional level. A high number of prisoners pass these examinations and so profit from this training.

Conclusion

A report was given on the activities undertaken for the 350th anniversary: important celebrations in Paris and Rome, Vincentian reflections published every month on the Web page, publication of the booklet about the 350th anniversary, the micro credits project in Haiti. Finally, Father Manuel Ginete gave a report on the development of continental sessions for Counsellors to the Vincentian Family (Mexico, Brazil, Cameroon, Thailand). The next session will be held in the United States in November 2010. These sessions are organised by the Commission for systemic change and the Vincentian Family Bureau in Rome.

Finally, the latest information was given about the next World Youth Days that will be held in Madrid in August 2011.

Extract from the minutes

PREPARATION FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR OF THE 350TH ANNIVERSARY

III - Louise de Marillac, Organiser 1660 – 2010

*“Enlarge the site of your tent, and let the curtains
of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back;
lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes,
for you will spread out to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will possess the nations...” (Is. 54, 2-3)*

“I don’t know what else to say, Father, except that the life of Mademoiselle Le Gras is a mirror in which we have only to look at ourselves.”¹

Monsieur Vincent gathered the Sisters together after the death of Mademoiselle Le Gras to speak about the virtues that they noticed in her and that they wished to imitate. Their magnificent response calls us to reflect as well. The originality of the spirit of Monsieur Vincent is that it is rooted in Jesus who became incarnate in order to carry out **the will of the Father, which is the will to serve humanity**. For Louise de Marillac, her “Light of Pentecost” pointed out to her the path of **mysticism in action**, not just for activities she would engage in later on, but in the living out of her present circumstances. Louise strove to be faithful to God in the present moment. Little by little, as needs became evident, **she gave of herself**.

LOUISE ORGANISES HER LIFE

In 1625 – Antoine Le Gras has been in eternal life since December 21st. *“I was alone with him to help him, at this important time of transition,”* she wrote. She renewed her vow of widowhood. The plan that stirred in the depths of her heart is expressed in the letter she wrote to her cousin: *“Is it not reasonable that I should be all for God, after being so long for the world? I tell you then, my dear cousin, that I want this with all my heart, and in the way it pleases him.”²* Despite this certainty, she waited for insight from God and sought guidance everywhere. In difficult moments, It is true that in difficult circumstances we need to make serious spiritual effort, but Louise also needed to make arrangements regarding her material circumstances. The absorbing task of looking after the needs of the Attichy family had led her husband to neglect his own family’s affairs.

¹ Coste X p. 577 – Conference of July 3rd, 1660

² Gobillon, p. 8, 10

A decision needed to be made. In the early months of her widowhood, motivated by her financial situation, but even more by her desire to lead a life of solitude, piety and good works, Mademoiselle Le Gras withdrew from the world she had lived in until that time.

She moved into a neighbourhood that was farther away from the city centre and unknown to the aristocracy. In the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, she occupied an old building on the street formerly called rue des Fosses Saint Victor.

Mademoiselle Le Gras was not alone, however. Her son Michel was twelve years old at the time of his father's death. A good-hearted but very lackadaisical boy, he remained in contact with his pious mother and he showed some inclination for the priesthood. The Saint Nicolas Seminary was therefore an appropriate place for him to be educated, and the thought that he could pursue his studies there without living with her was for Louise an indescribable consolation. M. Vincent would for many years be a mentor for Michel, to his mother's great satisfaction.

RULE OF LIFE

In the months just after moving into her home on Saint Victor, Louise worked out a rule of life in the world that she prefaced with the following words: ***In the name of God and with His divine assistance, may this be the way I live!*** This rule began with her rising. *"...Immediately after rising, I shall meditate for an hour or at least three quarters of an hour... After Mass ... On my return home ... I shall work until eleven o'clock... at midday, I shall meditate for a quarter of an hour. I shall try never to be idle. Therefore ... I shall work cheerfully, until four o'clock, either for the Church or for the poor or for my household. After supper, I shall engage in some leisure activity for half an hour..."*³

Without specifying the content, Louise passed immediately from this to an examination of conscience, noting down several specific points: *"...Sometimes, I shall examine my conscience on the manner in which, as a woman desirous of becoming devout, I fulfil the commandments of God and my obligations as a Christian and a Catholic... Once a week, I shall read the points which I wrote down about five years ago, so as to remind myself of the obligation I undertook to serve God all my life..."*⁴

"...I shall strive to the best of my ability to overcome my passions, especially vanity and hastiness..."

... I shall fast on all Fridays of the year; during Advent and Lent...

*... I would like to spend eight to ten days in retreat twice a year. One would be during the period between the Feast of the Ascension and Pentecost in order to honour the grace which God bestowed on His Church by giving it His Holy Spirit to guide it and by commissioning His Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations. At this time, I would strive to be particularly attentive to the Word of God and to His law expressed in His commandments."*⁵

HER RETREATS

³ Spiritual Writings, p. 689-690

⁴ Spiritual Writings, p. 690

⁵ Spiritual Writings, p. 691

These retreats were of the utmost importance in the life of Louise de Marillac. Monsieur Vincent organised the content and included advice leading to a broad and flexible spirituality: “*I almost forgot to tell you not to overburden yourself with rules of devotion, but persist in doing well those you have, your daily actions, your work; in a word, let everything revolve around doing well what you are doing.*”⁶

At the conclusion of this retreat, she wrote an act of consecration of herself to God, signing it as **Louise de Marillac**, the signature she would almost always use from then on. She wrote her rule of life, the beginning of which reads: “*May the desire for holy poverty always live in my heart in such a manner that, freed from all bonds, I may follow Jesus Christ and serve my neighbour with great humility and gentleness, living under obedience and in chastity all my life...*”⁷

The revisions that Monsieur Vincent made to these rules consisted above all in reducing corporal penances, restricting excessive fasts, and moderating her intense fervour by asking her to make clothing for poor persons. In her piety, which was simple, positive, and practical, Louise strove to bring Divine Love into her everyday activities. The means she used to nourish her piety were rather sophisticated: devotion to the Eucharist, to Jesus crucified, and to the Holy Spirit. Every year she celebrated with great devotion the Spirit’s coming into the Church and into her personal life. Her dedication to Jesus in poor persons enabled her to overcome her worries and to work to overcome her weaknesses. The encouragement from her spiritual director invited her to “*always wait patiently for the manifestation of His holy and adorable Will...*”⁸

THE FORMATION OF LOUISE DE MARILLAC BY MONSIEUR VINCENT

Monsieur Vincent, her new spiritual director, trained his spiritual daughter in his own special way. He observed her, gave advice, asked her to work for the poor and involved her directly in his work with poor persons: this began with asking her to make two or three shirts, then four, and later he thanked her for the twelve shirts she had sent. At this time, too, he recommended two young women to her care, asking her to help them find work.

About 1628, Louise told him of **her desire to consecrate herself totally to the service of the poor**. Having witnessed at first-hand these apostolic activities in all M. Vincent’s charitable works, she felt greatly moved by her experiences and developed the idea of consecrating her life to the service of poor persons by becoming involved in his holy enterprises.

For Monsieur Vincent, it was important to wait for God’s holy will to be manifested. Vincent strove first of all to form Louise in her interior life and the primary virtues necessary for an apostle of charity: humility, simplicity, and detachment from self. She entered wholeheartedly into this process, for she herself desired to put into practice what she saw in his life: interiority, recollection and action. Aided by grace, Louise understood that her devotional practices still needed to be purified. As Vincent advised her: “*...do not be distressed when you fail to do them. God is love and wants us to go to Him through love.*”⁹

⁶ Coste I, L. 266, p. 375-376

⁷ Spiritual Writings, p. 689

⁸ Coste I, L. 12, p. 24

⁹ Coste I, L. 49, p. 81

Monsieur Vincent was not always in a hurry to act; it was a question of waiting for God's time. And so it happened that on May 6th, 1629, an apparently unexpected invitation became, for Louise, a **sending on mission by Monsieur Vincent**: *"Go therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord..."*¹⁰ With these words, after years of patient waiting, Vincent sent Louise out on the highways of Charity.

Montmirail (1629) was her first experience,
Saint-Cloud (1630) her meeting with Marguerite Naseau,
Villepreux (1630, teaching the children catechism,
Montreuil (1631): Monsieur Vincent sent her the rules for the Charity:

Monsieur Vincent wrote "... *I have adapted them to the needs of Montreuil. Look them over and, if anything should be deleted or added, please let me know. Taking up a collection will be difficult in the village...*"¹¹ because this brought mockery from the townspeople.

Another appeal to her came after some difficult days: *"Now, since your girls have been trained, what remains to be done, and what is preventing you from returning tomorrow? They really need you here at the Charity of Saint-Sulpice. They have made a start but, according to what I have been told, things are going so badly that it is a real pity. Perhaps God is reserving for you the opportunity to work there."*¹² A letter invited her to *"Villeneuve-Saint-Georges where the Charity is going badly. I think Our Lord is reserving the success of that good work for you."*¹³

The correspondence between Monsieur Vincent and Louise de Marillac began to reveal his increasing confidence in her, as he gave her a significant role in his apostolic works: *"I certainly had no doubt at all that you would find very great difficulty in reestablishing the Charity, greater difficulty than you tell me. But blessed be God that there is some reason to hope you will set it up again!"*¹⁴

During this same period, Monsieur Vincent mentioned in his letter how pleased he was with the friendship between Mademoiselle Pollalion, Madame Goussault and Louise de Marillac: *"O Dieu! What a virtuous little group! I beg Our Lord to bind your hearts together into one, which will be His own, and to strengthen you in your work."*¹⁵

About the month of July 1632, he made an **appeal** to Louise de Marillac **for communication** with regard to a serious matter: *"It will be well for you to contact Madame Goussault and Mademoiselle Poulaillon to ask their opinion about Germaine. Just two days ago I became aware of that way of acting, which seems cordial and deferential to me. I may perhaps have offended them by having you make the final decision about your work without telling them."*¹⁶

GOD WISHES TO MAKE USE OF YOU...

¹⁰ Coste I, L. 39, p. 64

¹¹ Coste I, L. 64, p. 102

¹² Coste I, L. 66, p. 105

¹³ Coste I, L. 85, p. 128

¹⁴ Coste I, L. 110, p. 162-163

¹⁵ Coste I, L. 110, p. 163

¹⁶ Coste I, L. 113, p. 167

Marguerite Naseau was in hospital and Mademoiselle went to visit her. Monsieur Vincent learned about it and wrote immediately: *“No, Mademoiselle, have no fear. Our Lord wishes to make use of you for something that concerns His glory, and I think He will preserve you for that purpose.”*¹⁷

The Light of Pentecost never left Louise. Monsieur Vincent was well aware of this but nevertheless encouraged her to wait patiently: *“With regard to your employment, my mind is not yet enlightened enough before God concerning a difficulty which prevents me from seeing whether it is the Will of His Divine Majesty.”*¹⁸

Monsieur Vincent was in retreat. A letter he wrote to Mademoiselle contained the response she had been waiting for so long: *“I think your good angel did what you told me in the letter you wrote me. Four or five days ago, he communicated with mine concerning the Charity of your young women. It is true; he prompted me to recall it often and I gave that good work serious thought.”*¹⁹

(To be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Daughter of Charity

¹⁷ Coste I, L. 131, p. 186

¹⁸ Coste I, L. 138, p. 200

¹⁹ Coste I, L. 151, p. 216

The spirituality of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise

SOME ASPECTS OF SPIRITUALITY IN GENERAL

The word “spirituality” was already in existence in the 17th century, but neither Saint Vincent nor Saint Louise used this word. It was not until the second half of the last century that the word came into common usage. Still, its meaning was rather vague despite the fact that writers agreed that spirituality expresses a relationship between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. Spirituality can be considered under two essential aspects. The first, called “schools of spirituality” (systematic or consistent intellectual construction), includes the *principal teachings of the founders of religious institutions* with their principles, causes and reasons for their existence (for example, the Benedictine, Ignatian or Vincentian school). The second aspect is called “spiritual life” or *the action of the Spirit in the life of persons* and more specifically, *the person’s response to the action of the Holy Spirit to put on the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in solidarity with poor persons*. There are four elements necessary for the spiritual life: the action of the Holy Spirit, a response by the person, the following of Jesus Christ, and solidarity with poor persons. Christians are all called to follow Jesus Christ, or as our Founders said, to become clothed in his Spirit, to continue his mission of evangelisation and service to poor persons.

TWO MAJOR CURRENTS OF SPIRITUALITY

Jesus Christ is both human and divine, and the Christian is both sin and grace, wretchedness and image of God. Spirituality will differ according to the way people see themselves, as pessimists or optimists, and according to their ideas of Christ, as God before whom they bow down or as a human with whom they converse. This is why two major currents of spirituality have appeared throughout history. In the first, humanity is considered as worthless, a product of sin, in comparison with the grandeur of Christ-God. In the second, humans are regarded as children of God and find the love and mercy of the Father through Jesus Christ. These two currents branch out and take on numerous different forms.

FIRST CURRENT OF SPIRITUALITY: THE FRENCH SCHOOL

In 17th century Paris, the first current of spirituality is found, with a few distinctive features, in what is called the *French School* (Berulle, Benedict of Canfield, Andre Duval, director general of the Carmelites in France, and Michel de Marillac). This group is heir to the Gospel of Saint John, Saint Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Rheno-Flemish mystics.

In this school of spirituality, God is considered more in his Divine Essence than in the three Persons of the Trinity. The emphasis for this school is for the person to carry out God’s will in order to be united to the Essence of the Divinity more than to imitate Christ. In

mystical contemplation. direct union with God is sought without any intermediary, setting aside anything that has to do with human nature, including the human nature of Jesus. Those who wish to achieve this union must be totally stripped of themselves, demean themselves, empty themselves completely to the point of complete interior poverty. In this way, by abandoning themselves to God, they allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

We know very little about the interior life of Saint Vincent, for he rarely spoke about it.¹ When we study the language he used, it seems that in his early years in Paris, he followed this first current of spirituality, and would continue to maintain this throughout his life, although he added some more human elements to it. He talked about certain concepts such as mortification, abnegation, abandon, and the corrupt state of human nature. These ideas were common at this time, and stemmed from the Augustinian influence on this school.

Some of Louise's writings (meditations, retreat reflections) demonstrate more clearly the spirituality that she had discovered at the school of the Capuchins and the Oratorians. Vincent, on the other hand, had found his spirituality through Berulle.

A spirituality that responded to Louise's needs

This spirituality was a good response to the questions that Louise de Marillac asked in her youth. As a member of the nobility who had been disinherited and estranged from the Marillac family because of the circumstances of her birth, and taken out of the Poissy boarding school on the death of her father, Louise realised that she was alone in the world. In those days, the *family* to which one belonged guaranteed one's personhood, whereas Louise had been separated from her family. In addition, as a woman, she was subject to the authority of a man: father, husband, brother or guardian, and Louise had no man to defend her. At the age of about 15 or 16, she was introduced to prayer and meditation by a Capuchin priest.

When she was older, she wrote, as she recalled her early years and wondered why she had suffered so much: "*it was His holy will that I go to Him by way of the Cross. His goodness chose to mark me with it from my birth and He has hardly ever left me, at any age, without some occasion of suffering.*" (A 29) Her spirituality led her to seek a response from God. Trusting in God, she meditated on the series of events that made up her life and understood that this was God's plan and that she should collaborate with Him. This idea brought comfort and meaning to her life: *to collaborate with God so that his eternal plan would be accomplished.*

As a married woman, Louise had as her director the Bishop of Belley, Jean-Pierre Camus. In her meditation, she sensed that the Holy Spirit was leading her into a dark night of the soul (1622-1623), a way into mystical contemplation. She had a profound experience of the Holy Spirit's presence within her. We know this from her writings: "*...my soul was made to understand that my God wanted to come to me. However, He did not wish to come into some temporary dwelling but to a place that was rightly His and which belonged entirely to Him.*" (A 17)

This led her to the point of mystical union (about which Saint Teresa of Avila speaks in the sixth mansion). "*I left on the Feast of Saint Agatha, February 5th, to go to Saint-Cloud.*

¹ ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God...* Paris, Ed. Florentin Lambert, 1664, Book I, ch. XVIII. However, he uses these ideas and language to express this spirituality, when he speaks of priesthood, vocation and the Will of God.

At the moment of Holy Communion, it seemed to me that Our Lord inspired me to receive Him as the Spouse of my soul and that this Communion was a form of espousal. I felt myself more closely united to Him by this consideration which was extraordinary for me. I also felt moved to leave~ everything to follow my Spouse; to look upon Him as such in the future; and to bear with the difficulties I might encounter as part of the community of His goods.” Louise has arrived at the level of transforming union, and continues: “Throughout my travels, I seemed to be acting without any contribution on my part; and I was greatly consoled by the thought that God wished that, despite my unworthiness, I should help my neighbor to know Him.” (A 50)

We know that Vincent, too, experienced a dark night of the soul. In visions (extraordinary phenomena that may accompany contemplative prayer) he also entered into contemplation. It is not surprising, then, that he invited the Daughters of Charity to practise contemplation.

Louise and Vincent became mystics, something that Karl Rahner hoped all people would be, and he said that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all. Spirituality in the future will not be based on one unanimous conviction that is clear and public. It will only grow through spiritual experiences and personal decisions.²

The Founders knew, however, that this sort of spirituality was accessible to only a limited number of Daughters of Charity (LG 39-41), as most of them were simple peasant women. They lacked cultural upbringing, and their interior life was greatly influenced by popular religiosity. The Founders also thought that in order to reach holiness in the service of poor persons, another form of spirituality was more appropriate, and this is what they advised for the Sisters generally.

SECOND CURRENT OF SPIRITUALITY: A MORE HUMAN DEVOTION

This second manner of living spirituality is based on the synoptic Gospels. It has many points in common with modern day devotion and humanistic piety. In the past, ordinary people found the Rheno-Flemish spirituality confusing, as something abstract that belonged more to monks (that is, a few people) than to people living and working in the world. This latter group needed a form of spirituality that was more human and more simplified.

The basic characteristics of this spirituality (with many variations) are found in the “Imitation of Christ” of Thomas Kempis, in the Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and associated with Brother Luis of Grenada and Saint Francis de Sales.

This is the spirituality that Vincent and Louise passed on to the Daughters of Charity. The most important elements of this spirituality are: being centred on Jesus Christ, and imitating him in all the aspects of his life, not just in his self-emptying. This spirituality pays less attention to the intellectual aspect in order to focus on affectivity. It gives an important place to prayer with a method which insisted on practical resolutions, and careful choice of topics for each meditation and the different stages and parts of prayer.

Guided by Berulle, **Vincent** sought holiness through the first form of spirituality, termed “abstract”, and later progressively adopted the second spiritual current as he drew

² K. Rahner *Ecrits Théologiques (Theological Investigations)* VII DDB. 1967

nearer to the poor. Little by little, as his entire life became focused on poor persons, he found that this first spirituality with its intellectual approach was no longer useful for him, and so he gradually abandoned it. We can think of him as eclectic, as he had recourse at times to Benedict of Canfield, Berulle, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Brother Luis of Grenada or Saint Francis de Sales. This depended on what he found helpful in terms of caring for poor persons and evangelising them.

Louise's spiritual pathway was different. From the time of her birth, she had always known suffering, and needed to struggle on her own to find a place in society's pyramid of social strata. After all she had experienced, she felt attracted to the sense of annihilation offered by the first "abstract" spirituality current. This included a pessimistic concept of the person, which was significant in Augustinian thought in the 17th century,³ especially in the first current of spirituality. Louise's way of thinking was also very metaphysical.

In 1629, Louise's spirituality began to change. Vincent gently accompanied her towards a life with a more human God, a spirituality less speculative and more focused on Christ and everyday situations. This would continue until about 1653, at which point she returned to her first form of spirituality but one now coloured with Vincentian overtones. This is what I would call "Louisian" spirituality, with a strong presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a Trinitarian spirituality in which the Spirit appears in relationship with the Son and the Father within the Trinity. We see it also in the Spirit's action in human hearts, connecting them with the humanity of Christ and helping them to reach the state of pure love through total self-emptying.⁴

THE FOUNDERS' SPIRITUALITY

The spirituality Louise developed in her youth was a foundation for the service of poor persons. What Bremond said of Saint Vincent can also apply to Saint Louise: *"It was not the love of others that led him [her] to holiness. Rather, it was her holiness that enabled her to be effectively charitable. It was not the poor who brought her to God, but rather God who gave her to the poor."*⁵

Spiritual life nourished by service

Vincent easily guided Louise towards the discovery and service of Our Lord in poor persons: *"Go then, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord."* Beginning in 1629, Louise became *"the servant of poor persons"*.

After his captivity and dark night of the soul, Vincent was convinced that he must bring relief to the poor and that these were waiting for his help in their difficulties. He had no problem in convincing Louise to do the same. In her heart, her "Light" experience that God had communicated to her several years earlier (1623) was very clear: she, herself, had to take

³ Certain anthropological and theological arguments of Saint Augustine (profound corruption of humanity as a result of original sin; the necessity of grace for salvation) were adopted in a very strict way by Jansen. This influence marked the 17th and 18th centuries. For Jansenism, grace could not be obtained by virtuous conduct, not even by prayer and the sacraments. Even the just, in order to follow the commandments, needed grace for salvation, bestowed solely by the mercy of God.

⁴ Reread these marvellous writings of Saint Louise: A 25, 26 and 27. Also Coste XII, p. 210-211.

⁵ H. BREMOND, *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France, T. III, La conquête mystique, (History of religious sentiment in France, vol. 3, The mystical conquest)* Paris, Boud B. and Gay, 1923, p. 246.

care of poor persons and seek ways to meet their needs. At the end of her life, she meditated on the fact that Jesus: “*had taught us charity to make up for our powerlessness to render any service to His person.*” (A 26, 3rd day)

Vincent encouraged Louise in her solidarity with all humanity. In prayer, the two saints discovered that, through the Incarnation, the Son of God took on our human nature. Each poor person is therefore a suffering member of this humanity, and Jesus wants to establish the Kingdom of Heaven for everyone, including the poor. Vincent and Louise were called to help Him.

The mystery of the Incarnation in the spirituality of the Founders

The Incarnation became the focal point of the spirituality of both the Founders, but in different ways.

Vincent never explained how this event influenced all his spirituality, but we know that he recommended teaching this doctrine to poor people for their salvation. This was the thinking at that time.⁶ Jesus was at the centre of Vincent’s life, to such an extent that he identified holiness with the expression: “*to clothe oneself with the Spirit of Jesus.*” With regard to the Incarnation, Berulle emphasised the divine nature of Jesus more than his human nature. This was what he taught and what he shared with the other schools of spirituality as they meditated on Christ. Like them, Vincent taught and lived a Christocentric spirituality.

Louise described how the Incarnation of the Son of God had changed her spiritual life, and how this mystery had become the focal point of her personal life and her commitment as a Daughter of Charity. This is confirmed in several ways: she decided to make her vows in the Company on the feast of the Incarnation itself, which she called *our dear feast*, she meditated on the mystery of it and wrote pages of beautiful reflections on this topic, after the model of the Scottish doctrine (of Duns Scot) that she adopted. This confirms that the salvation of the human race is achieved through the Incarnation, and that holiness comes from uniting oneself to the humanity of Jesus.

In order to have an authentic love for God, we must love not only God, but also the world, the object of God’s love. Louise added that God did not create the world out of nothing, but rather *out of Himself*, that God is love. Besides being the product of God’s love, the human race also participates in this divine love. As human beings we love to be happy, but we cannot find true happiness in created things which are imperfect and become obsolete. God alone is the source of happiness. This is why Louise strives to be united with Christ in his human nature.

She frequently meditated deeply on this insight: “*I saw that His power to possess me was, by the excellence of the divine plan in the creation of the human race, to be found in His close, eternal union with His creatures. He brought this about through the unique means that He possessed which was the Incarnation of His Word. As perfect man, the Son willed that human nature should participate in the Divinity through His merit and through the close union of His nature with the Father.*” (A 26 p. 817)

⁶Coste I, p. 119; XI, p. 173, 343; XII, p. 73.

"It seemed to me that it is in this way that the holy humanity of Our Lord is continually present to us... His presence is like air without which the soul is lifeless. It is thus that I see the Redemption of men in the Incarnation... the personal union of a God to man. All nature is thereby honoured since it causes God to see His image in all mankind" (A 14, p. 784-785).

Both saints spoke of following and imitating Jesus Christ and advised *emptying oneself of self and becoming clothed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. To follow and imitate Jesus Christ means to walk with Him and take on his ways. To be clothed with his Spirit means to become Christ himself. This implies incorporating the humanity of Christ, *becoming rooted in Him as the source and model of all charity*, as Saint Paul said to the Colossians: *"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught"* (Col. 2:6-7). This explains how Louise was able to write one day: *"Let us live, therefore, as if we were dead in Jesus Christ. Henceforth, let there be no further resistance to Jesus, no action except for Jesus, no thoughts but in Jesus! May my life be solely for Jesus and my neighbour so that, by means of this unifying love, I may love all that Jesus loves, and through the power of this love which has as its centre the eternal love of God for His creatures, I may obtain from His goodness the graces which His mercy wills to bestow upon me."* (A 23, p. 786)

As she began her visits to the Charities, Louise clothed herself with Jesus Christ in such a way that on one of her journeys, she realised that she was not the one who was doing the work, but that Jesus Christ had taken possession of her life. (A 50)

The spirituality of service lived out in community

At Chatillon-les-Dombes, Vincent discovered that helping poor people is only effective if it is done as a team. This is the reason why he founded the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, to which Louise de Marillac consecrated her entire life. This is how the traits of his spirituality took shape: *"clothe oneself with the Spirit of Jesus Christ to evangelise and serve poor people in community"*. In order to achieve this more easily, its members are supported by the Eucharist, the sacrament of reconciliation, and especially by prayer. As recommended by the spiritual leaders of the 17th century and in the words of Vincent: *"Give me a man of prayer, and he'll be able to do anything."* (Coste XI, p. 76)⁷

For Vincent and the Priests of the Mission, the sign that they had clothed themselves in the Spirit of Jesus Christ was when they acquired simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for the salvation of souls (missionary charity). For Louise and the Daughters of Charity, it would be humility, simplicity and charity.⁸ The central axis supporting all these virtues is charity, or love. To use a more modern term, this is solidarity in the service of poor persons, while living in community.

When solidarity is called compassion

Charity or solidarity *with those who suffer* is motivated by human emotion, a feeling called compassion that comes from the heart: *"...the sick poor should be treated as this same*

⁷ See the two conferences to the Daughters of Charity on Prayer: May 31st, 1648 and October 13, 1658.

⁸ Coste XII Conference to the Missionners of August 22nd, 1659; Saint Louise A 78.

[Divine] Goodness teaches you, that is, with gentleness, compassion, and love" (Coste X, p. 268). Compassion became a defining element of the spirituality of the two Founders as they shared with and served those living in poverty. Charity in the spirituality of the Founders has been the object of much study. Compassion needs to be studied as well.

Because she had been deprived of affection during her childhood, Louise was very sensitive and emotional. Vincent often advised her be careful about her emotions, but her suffering had made her very sensitive to others' suffering. Vincent, despite having a personality that seemed sullen, harsh and quick-tempered, also had a sensitive, compassionate side to his nature. He had a childlike devotion to the Virgin Mary, gave alms to poor people, became emotional at the age of 20 on seeing the tomb of the apostles in Rome, and felt deep pain as he visited his family for the last time and gave up the idea of giving them any further financial assistance. Several years later he wrote: *"Do you think I do not love my relatives? I indeed have the same feelings of affection for them that anyone would have. My natural instinct is to help them"*⁹

Love begins with compassion: sharing the suffering of poor people, discovering and providing solutions to their needs. This is the way the compassion that Jesus experienced for the poor has been communicated to us and transformed into Vincentian charity: *"Since the Son of God was unable to have feelings of compassion in the state of His glory, which He possesses from all eternity in heaven, He willed to become man and to be our High Priest in order to share our sufferings. To reign with Him in heaven, we must, like Him, commiserate with His members on earth."* (Coste XI p. 69)

In this form of spirituality, the first way that compassion is manifested is in approaching those who are poor and experiencing their suffering. Louise expressed this clearly to Vincent during the distress of the Fronde war. She was with the abandoned babies and children, heard their cries and witnessed the sacrifices made by the wet nurses, poor peasant women whom she was unable to pay. (L. 279)

Vincent also said that we cannot live a spiritual life unless we have compassion: *"Quoi! To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him! That's to be lacking in charity; it's being a caricature of a Christian; it's inhuman; it's to be worse than animals."* (Coste XII p. 222)

The great danger for Vincentian spirituality and service of poor people is if those who are compassionate, who give, heal and help others, do it in a way that makes them superior to those who are receiving – the poor or sick person. There is a danger that those who are compassionate will feel that they are superior to those who suffer. In order to avoid compassion that is tinged with self-importance for the giver and humiliation for the recipient, Vincent and Louise chose the virtues of *humility and simplicity* in imitation of the humble and simple Christ. This God became human and was born in a stable, was baptised as if he

⁹ Abelly Book 3 Chapter XIX. Abelly describes that about 1650, M. du Fresne gave Vincent a thousand francs to help his family, who had lost everything to soldiers during the war. When the saint had finally agreed to accept to use the money to help them, he uttered the words quoted in the text, and added: *"but I must act according to the movements of grace, and not those of nature. I should think of those poor persons who are even worse off, rather than of my friends and relatives."* Similarly, he was touched by a priest, former member of the Congregation of the Mission, who had saved Saint Vincent's life. Many times he had asked to be readmitted, but always in vain. The idea occurred to him to remind the Saint of the service he had once rendered him. On recalling it, Saint Vincent yielded and sent him a letter of which Collet has preserved only the following words: *"Come, Monsieur, and you will be received with open arms."* (Coste V, p. 543).

were a sinner, had compassion on humanity, and died on a cross. He wanted to be part of those who are marginalised, *the humble ones, the anawim* of the Bible.¹⁰ Compassion evokes a desire to bring the poor out of their state of misery and to proclaim a Kingdom of justice, love and peace, a more human and compassionate reality.

Compassion must be sincere, without hypocrisy or deception. It was only with this sort of compassion that Louise could contemplate the simplicity of Jesus as a little baby, or Jesus on the cross. This is what Vincent advised for the Sisters.¹¹ As we read the letters of Louise and the conferences of Vincent, we see that they defined compassion as the human way of living like Jesus. Compassion towards poor people leads us to serve them with simplicity, gentleness and respect, just as Saint Paul recommended to the Romans: *“Let love be genuine...Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.”* (Rom. 12: 9, 15-16).

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¹⁰ SL Spiritual Writings L. 183, 353, 377, 565, 647B, A 8, 14, 62, M 40B... SV.Coste XII, 216, 221-222...

¹¹ SL. Spiritual Writings A. 8, 9, 21 and 21B. SV. Conference of February 24th 1652

Jubilee Year
of the 350th anniversary
of the death
of the Founders