

September-October 2010

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FATHER GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter of 21st October 2010

To Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General,
and all the Daughters of Charity

**INSERT PHOTO*

My Dear Sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

As you know, because Father Javier Alvarez was elected Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission during our last General Assembly, I initiated a consultation among the General Council and the Provincial Councils of the Daughters of Charity for the designation of a new Director General.

Today, therefore, after studying the results of this consultation, and with the consent of my Council, I am happy to announce that I have named **Father Patrick GRIFFIN** as Director General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity for a mandate of six years.

Father Griffin, who accepted his nomination in a spirit of faith and with generosity, is from the Eastern Province in the United States. Born on December 9th 1952 in Brooklyn, New York, he entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 21st 1972 in Philadelphia and was ordained a Priest of the Mission on May 26th 1979 at Northampton, Pennsylvania. After completing a doctorate in Biblical Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. (1984), he taught at various Vincentian universities and seminaries from 1984 – 1993. In 1993, Father Griffin was named Econome General of the Congregation of the Mission and served in this role in Rome until 1999. On his return to the United States he taught Scripture at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception (Huntington, N.Y.). Assigned to St. John's University (Queens, N.Y.) in August 2008, Father Griffin took on the role of Executive Vice President for Mission and the Vincentian Chair of Social Justice.

For most of his ministry, Fr. Griffin has been an educator and involved in formation work with seminarians. His position at St. John's gave him primary responsibility for promoting the Vincentian and Catholic character of the University across all its constituencies.

Together, let us thank him for his availability and assure him of our prayer and our support. In this Jubilee Year which we recently closed, let us confide the mandate of Father Griffin to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, asking that they will obtain for him the light, wisdom, and strength of the Holy Spirit for the new mission with which he has been entrusted.

At this same time, I renew my thanks to Father Javier Alvarez who, during the past six years, knew how to respond to the demands of his mission, primarily with the General Council, but also with the Sisters and the Provincial Directors. I am aware that he has been greatly appreciated. I am happy to have worked with him and now am blessed with the grace to be able to work more closely with him. We also wish him fruitful service within the General Council of the Congregation of the Mission.

May Mary, whom we invoke particularly during this month of the Rosary, accompany each of us in our mission of evangelisation of the Poor through our various ministries.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FATHER JAVIER ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Outline for the monthly day of reflection and prayer

**The Vincentian Christ:
“Adorer, Servant and Evangeliser” (C. 8a)**

“THE VINCENTIAN CHRIST; ADORER OF THE FATHER, SERVANT AND EVANGELISER” (C 8a)

All Christians, and of course all consecrated persons, have this in common; they are all followers of Christ. No vocation in the Church can exist apart from Him because they all regard themselves as followers of Jesus Christ. Each religious family, each Congregation, has its own special way of following Him and this gives rise to the numerous charisms which are and which will be in the Church. What are the features of Jesus Christ that Vincent de Paul discovered and emphasised and on which he built the Vincentian charism? Vincentians have to realise what these characteristics are so that they can reproduce them in their lives or, as Vincent himself said, *“be clothed with them.”* The Constitutions speak of three of these features; *“Adorer of the Father, Servant of his loving plan, and Evangeliser of the poor.”* (C 8a).

1. “Adorer of the Father.”

Vincent was fascinated by this aspect of Jesus Christ. He is *“Adorer of the Father”* because he cultivated in his life the dispositions of adoration, praise, dependency and trust. *“Jesus Christ had such high regard for Him (his Father) that he rendered Him homage with all his human personhood and in everything he did...”*¹

What was the source of this interior disposition of Jesus? We cannot, of course, explain what we mean by Jesus as “Adorer of the Father” or what this led to, if we do not understand his deep prayer life. Prayer, for Jesus, was his soul’s very breath. In prayer he

¹ XI, 411, conference given by St Vincent to the missionaries on 13th December 1658, on membership of the Congregation of the Mission and on its works.

progressively came to understand who God is, who He is, and the relationship between himself and God, as well as the mission that the Father entrusted to him. In short, it was in prayer that Jesus found the great means of always being aware of the unity between the Father and himself. A deep prayer life gives a person an awareness of God and a deep intimacy that no other actions could, no matter how good these may be. The Gospel tells us that it is through the wisdom of simple souls that the face of God the Father is revealed (cf. Mt 11, 25)

Also, Jesus was “*Adorer of the Father*” because throughout the whole of his life he was careful to do His will. Saint Vincent often spoke of this but this one quotation will suffice to illustrate this, “*The Son of God did nothing else on earth except the will of his Father; throughout his whole life he obeyed his Father’s rules, even though he did not have them in writing, because he knew them before he came into the world and offered to come on earth in order to fulfil them. He observed these rules perfectly and never did anything save what he knew was in conformity with them and pleasing to his Father.*”² When Saint Vincent spoke to the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity about the need to obey the will of God in everything, he was thinking of Jesus whose food was “*to do the will of the Father.*” For a Vincentian this is the example, the path to follow and the most important motivation we could have.

Imitating this feature of Jesus Christ as “Adorer of the Father”, means for the Daughters of Charity, two things.

1. To be continually seeking to know God’s will: “*Lord, what do you want of me at this particular stage in my life, in this particular situation? What should I do at these times and how should I act?*”

These questions must often be on the lips of a son or daughter of Saint Vincent. Our decision to follow a vocation means that we realised this was God’s will for us. However, neither God’s will nor vocation is a fixed and passive reality but both have a special dynamism with regard to the individual person. Keeping alive one’s option to follow a vocation means, for authentic Vincentian spirituality, engaging in the process of discerning God’s will, which will of course guide our choices along the same path as the vocation we have discovered and embraced. In short, this feature of the Vincentian Christ will keep alive and ever fresh our Vincentian vocation.

In order to find out God’s will, the Daughter of Charity uses daily prayer, just as Jesus did, but also discerns this divine will through events. We need to have the right kind of antennae to decipher the message that God is continually sending to Earth, to this world which came forth from his hands and which He holds dear. In this process we have to look to the example of Saint Vincent, a master in interpreting God’s will in one’s life. Sacred Scripture, Church documents, the Constitutions and the guidelines offered by the Company will always be objective indications of how to live in accordance with God’s will. We cannot disregard all these if we really want to practise discernment. But to be an “Adorer of the Father” requires more than simply knowing God’s will.

² IX 734; conference of St Vincent to the first Sisters, 29th September 1655, on An explanation of the Common Rules

2. To find ways of putting God's will into practice. *"It is not those who say 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven."* (Mt 7,21). The example given by Jesus is clear and compelling; God's will leads him to the point of accepting the Cross. It is not always easy to understand God's will and put it into practice. It requires courage and trust in the biblical sense of this word. It means that we need the help of the Holy Spirit.

II JESUS,"SERVANT OF HIS LOVING PLAN.

God's plan for humankind is a loving plan. God created human beings so that they could relate to Him. (cf. Gen 2, 5-25). After they sinned, God himself put forward the Covenant by which they could once more have a relationship with Him (cf. Ex 19 and ff). Then He made Israel his chosen people, sent them the prophets and finally came Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. All these initiatives and many others were put in place simply to facilitate communication between God and the human beings He could not forget. Sacred Scripture uses strong and striking images such as the hen gathering her chickens under her wing or a shepherd caring for his flock (cf Ps 22).

. His "loving plan" is never meant to portray God and man as opposing forces or rivals. God created the human race for their happiness. Human beings, for their part, need God in order to build human society. Without God, man is an alienated and empty creature and it is only in God that he finds complete fulfilment.

God's loving plan was completed when the Scriptures reveal that from among all human beings He has a special love for his children who are most in need, those living in the most painful situations. If human parents show love for their children, how much more so will God the Father? *"If you, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven do this?"* (Lk 11, 13).

Saint Vincent was overwhelmed by Christ's statement that he had been sent to the poor and the oppressed. We see that Jesus showed a very special and undeniable devotion to those who are marginalised by society; the poor, sinners, prostitutes, children and the despised tax collectors. Saint Vincent went so far as to say, that Jesus Christ devoted himself primarily to the poor... Never has any great leader shown such concern for people's material problems. We see the explanation for this when Jesus declared at the beginning of his public life that he had come *"to serve and not to be served."* We shouldn't be surprised, then, that he should kneel down like a slave and wash the disciples' feet (cf. Jn 13, 1-18). Such dedication to the lowest and most contemptible representatives of humanity was a scandal to the people of his time and has been a scandal to the mighty ones throughout the ages. We see here that Christ is putting into practice his prioritising of the poor, something that is also evident in his teaching. When he defines who our neighbour is he takes as an example someone who is suffering and in need (cf Lk 10, 29). He names those who will have a special place in the kingdom as the poor, those who mourn, the hungry, those who are persecuted for the sake of justice (cf. Lk 6, 20). This tenderness of Jesus for the poor is something unheard of among history's great leaders. This compassion of Christ did not escape Saint Vincent's notice.

Imitating the second feature of Jesus Christ (*"Servant of His loving plan*) means that the Daughters of Charity have to abase themselves (just as Jesus did in the mystery of the Incarnation) to the point of seeing the poor as *"our lords and masters"* to use that telling expression of Saint Vincent. But are we not used to speaking or hearing such very

demanding phrases as that one and then continuing to act just as we did before. To avoid this danger, when we hear the words “*lords and masters*” it would be good for us to bring to mind specific people we are called to serve and then see them as “our lords and masters” as Saint Vincent would wish us to do. This means we have to live continually in the presence of God.

Thinking of the poor in this way does not mean giving up anything we have by way of personal qualities, training or our capacity for work, but of putting these at the service of those who are poor. It also means realising that in so doing we are imitating one of the most important features of Christ and collaborating in God’s great plan for humanity through even the most humble and hidden services we offer. When this service is rendered to poor people that is enough to make the person offering it a “servant of God’s loving plan”.

III. “JESUS, EVANGELISER OF THE POOR”

Vincent was fascinated by this third defining feature of Jesus. When Jesus came to the synagogue in Nazareth the first thing he did was to describe himself in these terms, applying to himself the words in chapter 61 of the prophet Isaiah, “*The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor.*” (Lk 4,18). This short speech could be described as the “programme speech” for the Gospels. Christ’s entire life would simply be these words put into practice.

This face of Christ penetrated deeply into the life of Vincent and he felt so strongly affected by it that every day he felt himself called to accomplish the same mission. When Vincent saw the state of the poor country people (utterly abandoned and completely ignorant of anything relating to the gospel message) he could no longer hold back from the path that the Holy Spirit was pointing out to him. From this moment his life changed track and led him towards the poor in order to evangelise them as the Son of God did.

Christ, the evangeliser of the poor, not only inspired and influenced Vincent’s spirituality but also was the guiding principle for all the institutions he founded throughout his life. “*What did the Son of Man do?*”- Saint Vincent asked himself during a repetition of prayer – “*He left his Eternal Father, the place of his repose and glory. And for what reason? To come down to this earth and be with men in order to instruct them by his words and by his example, in order to free them from their captive state and redeem them. To achieve this he went so far as to shed his own blood. In the same way, Fathers, we must be ready for any eventuality, we must be prepared to leave everything, our comforts and the things we like, to serve God and our neighbour.*”³

But what does evangelising mean? Vincent says that “*evangelising the poor does not mean simply teaching them the mysteries necessary for salvation, but we have to do all the things foretold and prefigured by the prophets, to make the Gospel effective.*”⁴ And according to Christ himself, to evangelise means “*to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to heal the sorrowful of heart, to announce liberty to captives and new sight to the blind.*” (Lk 4, 18-19). To put it another way, to evangelise means to present the Gospel in words and ways that are meaningful and accompanied by good works. The Gospel has a holistic approach. Christ did not come to set up some strange division between body and spirit, but to save

³ Xi, 310; repetition of prayer, 11th November 1657

⁴ IX, 391, conference given by Saint Vincent to the missionaries, 6th December 1658, on the end of the Company.

people in time and in eternity. This is how the Company understands the work of evangelisation that the Church entrusts to it. This is carried out specifically through the corporal and spiritual service of the poor. “*With constant concern for the promotion of the whole person, the Company does not separate corporal service from spiritual service, nor the work of humanisation from that of evangelisation.*” (C14). The Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* speaks of evangelisation in the same terms. It says, “*Serving the poor is an act of evangelisation and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity.*”⁵

From all this we can draw two conclusions:

* Any material service no matter how humble it may be, should not be regarded simply as a positive witness that prepares the way for evangelisation. It is a work of evangelisation of the highest order which brings Christ’s salvation to our own times.

* If evangelisation includes corporal and spiritual service, the Priests of the Mission cannot sideline corporal service and the Daughters of Charity cannot neglect the spiritual aspect of service.

Becoming evangelisers of the poor after the example of Jesus Christ and of Saint Vincent presupposes that we have first let ourselves be touched by God’s love and have let ourselves have an inner longing that is like fire. We use this image because it is one that Saint Vincent himself often used. For example, he told the Sisters who were being sent to Metz that they should carry out the mission confided to them “*like a fire that warms all who draw near to it.*” He added, “*Fervour is charity on fire, and that is what you should have.*”⁶ This means, then, that if we want to pass on the Good News in a way that is at all in keeping with the Gospel, we have to be careful that our facial expression reflects this message because we cannot present Good News (and service of the poor is Good News in action) if we appear sad and scowling. The faithful have often been accused of being too anchored in “Good Friday.” We mustn’t forget that Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday. And it is Easter that is paramount, not Good Friday. Undue sadness is a denial of Christ’s Resurrection; spontaneous joy arises from the mystery of Redemption and gives colour and sparkle to life. When we say that evangelisers have to be careful how they appear to others, we are really saying that they have to cultivate the virtue of faith. Faith is the soul’s countenance and the seal of authenticity on the one who evangelises. The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* has made it clear that people today are more ready to listen to people who can give personal witness than they are to experts because the testimony they give comes from their inner experience.

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND PRAYER AND FOR COMMUNITY SHARING

* Meditate on Lk 4, 14-22 and Mt 25, 31-46 and/or Saint Vincent’s conference to the Daughters of Charity given on 2nd November 1655 on the Maxims of Jesus Christ and those of the world (IX, 758-773).

- Do I realise that by the service I offer (whatever it may be) I am collaborating in God’s loving plan which He wants all people to fulfil and live out in this life”? What can I do to strengthen in myself this Vincentian conviction?

⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 82

⁶ IX, 1096; instruction given by Saint Vincent to four Sisters being sent to Metz, 26th August 1658

FATHER O RIBADEAU-DUMAS, VICAR APOSTOLIC

Topical issues

Poverty in Paris

Notes taken during a conference in a formation session for those in ministry in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (priests, Sisters, and lay people)

As Director of the Apostolic Vicariate for Solidarity, I will try to provide an overview of the major forms of poverty in Paris. Then, in the second part of my presentation, we will examine how the diocese and the Church in Paris try to address these situations.

I – FORMS OF POVERTY IN PARIS

“The poor, you will always have with you”, Jesus told us. This is true for Paris. Although Paris is the city of lights, at the same time, it is a city of shadows where poverty takes on multiple forms.

From among these various types of poverty I will create very artificial divisions to highlight three of them: the more traditional types, the new forms, and the new patterns of poverty that have existed since former times.

1 – Traditional forms of poverty

These are forms of poverty with which you are very familiar, since the Vincentian Family has been dealing with them for a long time. One example is the issue of **isolation** in a city as big as ours. Anonymity is particularly widespread in our city. As Christians, we have in our network of Catholic parishes a considerable resource available to us to combat isolation and loneliness. It seems to me that in our city, there is no more tightly knit network than that of the parishes in the Catholic Church, except for the school network which serves a completely different purpose. This network, this urban construct of Catholic Churches makes it possible to be seriously on the lookout for all sorts of poverties linked to isolation, something we mistakenly think of only in connection with elderly persons.

Before I became the Episcopal Vicar for Solidarity, I was in charge of the youth ministry and student ministry programmes for the diocese. The number of students who experience a deep level of isolation is shocking. One day, just before Christmas, I met a young man who said to me: “You know, Father, you’re the first person I’ve spoken to since September. I think that if I hadn’t met you, I would have taken my own life.” If poverty and loneliness among young people is so striking, so, too, is the isolation felt by single parents. According to current statistics, 53% of births now take place outside of marriage. In other words, a large number of children are raised by only their mother or their father. The isolation and solitude that exist among parents is another reality that we frequently face. I will return to this question later.

In order to deal with this issue of isolation and loneliness, one of the measures to be developed or renewed is the provision of places where people can be listened to. Relationship is the vital element here.

In the diocese of Paris, we have begun a programme called “Winter Solidarity.” This addresses a second form of poverty: **the precarious situation of people living on the streets**. Faced with the difficulties linked to housing, especially in emergency cases, Cardinal Andre Vingt-Trois asked all the parishes of Paris to open the doors of their parish halls, not just to allow persons living on the streets to stay there during the very cold weather, but also to give parishioners the opportunity to extend hospitality to those living on the streets. About 25 parishes have participated in this endeavour during periods of severe winter weather. They will certainly renew their efforts when the cold weather returns. What we have witnessed, and what the persons living on the streets have told us, is that they can find a roof over their head, but here they find more; they find family and friendship. I believe that the primary challenge that confronts us in a city such as ours is the challenge of building relationships.

All of us as Christians must ask ourselves this question: do I really take to heart the idea that the most important gift I can give to others is the experience of relationship? This issue of relationship is central to the issue of loneliness.

The second challenge that confronts us is that of **migrants**. Certainly, with regard to this issue, there is a political aspect that is not for me to develop here. Behind all politics, however, there are always the human faces of men and women with their history, difficulties and aspirations. It is difficult to establish statistics, but it is estimated that about 14.5% of those who live in Paris are foreigners. Immigration today takes multiple forms: those who seek a better economic future, others who flee their country because of persecution, families arriving because of changing family structures, etc. At the same time, major changes are related to the broader notion of Europe (for example, the Romani or gypsies are clearly part of the European Union, although they are in a particular category). Within the issue of immigration, let us consider the case of minors. Today Paris faces the influx of a significant number of minors, especially minors from Afghanistan and this is a difficult situation. What actions can we take in the face of this very unique form of poverty?

At the heart of this issue of migrants is the extremely difficult situation of those who are “**undocumented**”. Without documents, there are no jobs, and without a job, one cannot find housing, and this is how people get caught up in this vicious circle. These are extremely widespread problems, all the more so because current policies hardly allow any choice. The authorities in Rome, the pontifical council for migrants, the Pope, and our archbishop remind us that, contrary to public opinion, migration is an opportunity. Nevertheless, many organisations are confronted with the painful task of having to accompany people when they know that there is no solution to their problems.

With regard to this issue of emigration, charity and solidarity call us to create new ways of operating. Charity has greatly evolved over time. We have moved from a position of giving assistance to one of accompaniment, then from accompaniment to a position of taking action and involving the people who are in difficulty. However, there are situations in which we are at an impasse. How, for example, can we accompany those without any hope of a solution except to tell them that their only recourse is to return to their country of origin? Can we tell someone that he or she must return to a country and face persecution? This situation

of emigration has led many of us to practise extraordinary generosity and to create a number of possible steps to take.

Another extremely complex issue in Paris is that of **housing**. The Catholic Church in Paris has various contacts with the city, the Prefecture, and the government, in order to reflect together with other Christians, about means of making vacant housing available to those in need. There are many concerted actions. Unfortunately, the overall network for housing in Paris and other cities in France has broken apart. This is true for emergency housing (for 48 hours), bridge housing for reinsertion of families into society (for 6 months to 1 year), intermediary houses (for up to 2 or 3 years), and subsidised housing (long-term). The absence of flexibility in these various structures makes the situation very difficult. In the private sector, the cost of rent is much too high. We see very sad situations, where people who have no access to housing end up living in their car.

In today's world a new category of poverty is beginning to emerge: **poor workers who are without accommodation**. These women and men work hard every day, but they have no housing. This is a particularly important issue.

In an attempt to find a remedy for this critical question of housing, many propositions have been suggested but not acted on, such as the idea of constructing large buildings to provide housing along the outskirts of Paris. Some suggest facilitating property ownership, but here again there may be hazards associated with this. If people become property owners, they need to be able to guarantee that they can pay the property taxes. In the diocese of Paris, many associations help families who are in inadequate housing. One of my hardest responsibilities is that of negotiating with groups who are occupying the churches. Four years ago, this involved mostly groups of homeless people, but for the last two years, it is more often people with inadequate housing who are living in the churches. Catholic Social Services is doing remarkable work to help so many families in difficulty.

Another form of poverty which has existed for a long time is that of **unemployment and lack of job security**. Today, however, this insecurity is particularly acute **for young people**. Young workers move from one short-term contract to another, six months at a time, without being sure that they will be able to find another job at the end of the six month term. Sociologists say that people pass from youth to adulthood by way of a transition involving three stages: from one's family of origin to forming one's own family, from living with one's parents to living independently, and in finding permanent employment. These are the three significant steps toward adulthood. Today, however, employment is not secure until one has reached 30 to 35 years of age, in other words, ten years after entering the professional field. The issues of insecurity, of temporary work, of imposed part-time work or lack of professional qualification occur more frequently than in the past, presenting extremely difficult problems.

Another category of persons in difficulty is **unemployed among people over the age of 50**, for whom it is very difficult to find help.

2 – NEW FORMS OF POVERTY

Those forms of poverty that we have known for a long time or which have always existed, are now joined by new types of poverty. I would like to point out three of them (this

is in no way an exhaustive list). I have chosen them because they seem to be particularly symptomatic of the time in which we are living.

a) The first new form of poverty is due to the **breakdown of the nuclear family**. (traditional family unit of two parents and children).

26% of families in Paris are single-parent families, in comparison with the rest of France, where the rate is 17%. Here in Paris, we have quite a significant concentration of single-parent families.

Whether they are the result of divorce, widowhood or being a single mother, most single-parent families are characterised by low income. Their poverty is not only material in nature but also linked to education. It is always more difficult to raise and educate a child when one is alone. This is one of the reasons why education issues have become so complex.

The issues relating to education of children and to relationships are that of otherness, in other words, the differentiation between man and woman, and so father and mother, the differences between generations. This issue concerns school as much as the family.

Today, another serious question presents itself: the disintegration of the father figure and the crisis of paternity which creates significant poverty. When I was the pastor of a parish, a young high school boy said to me: "How can I identify with my father if I have never seen him work a day in his life?" Within this disintegration of the nuclear family, there is also the tragedy of abortion. There are numerous organisations that provide counselling to women before and/or after they have an abortion.

b) The second new form of poverty is **psychological poverty**.

One of the principal aspects of the Solidarity Mission that has been confided to me, is prison ministry. I work with the National Council of Prison Health. In 1995, a study was conducted among people who were in prison, to determine the number of them with psychological or psychiatric problems. About 15% were found at that time, and when the study was repeated in 2008, the number had increased to 55%. This is the statistic currently given by the prison administration, demonstrating that half of all detainees have some psychological disorder. This means that we are dealing with a failure of our psychiatric system, that society is generating poverty and psychological imbalances. The upsurge of these imbalances goes hand in hand with the lack of places to receive people. In our parishes, we recognise an ever-growing need to have places to welcome and listen to people. There are quite a few associations in existence, such as "SOS Christians" for listening ministry, "SOS Friendship", "SOS Prayers", and telephone ministry to listen to people's needs, but these are not enough.

c) The third form of poverty is the coming of the **fourth or fifth age**.

I have the good fortune of having two grandparents who each have reached the age of 100, but this situation is not without problems. It means that my parents, who are both 75, provide care not only for their grandchildren, but also their parents. As a result, they are not really profiting from their retirement. My father has said to me: "*I probably still have 5 good years ahead of me before my health begins to decline. However, in 5 years, my mother might also still be alive.*"

So the onset of the fourth or fifth age has implications for an entire generation. I think that society has not yet become fully aware of what this increased life span will mean, and what responsibilities it entails for families. This is a new area about which we need to reflect. Thirty years ago, when my great grandmother turned 100, the mayor came to congratulate her. Today, if the mayor paid a visit to all the centenarians in his district, it would take up all his time.

With regard to these new forms of poverty, the Church has a very special role to play, without trying to take the place of public powers. The Church has created associations (e.g. Liberty to Captives), has opened up new ways (changed focus to go out and meet people living on the streets) that now have been adopted by many other institutions. For me, Christians must always ask themselves: “where can we go that no one else has gone?” and “who is not being reached by public services?” and “what pathways are we called to throw open?”

With regard to family issues, psychological poverty, advancing age, but also the issue of adults with disabilities, which I have not mentioned, we have a very special and significant role to play. In opening the Tiberias Centre on rue de Varennes in the 1980s, the Church in Paris played a very significant role in the combat against AIDS and care of persons who were sick. Now is the time to create other places, and begin other works to respond to these new forms of poverty.

3 New variations of old forms of poverty

We also discover in today’s world new patterns of old forms of poverty, **impoverishment of sections of the population who are becoming more and more poor.**

If we consider the persons being served by major organisations such as Catholic Social Services or by large centres that take in people in need, we notice that **retired people** suffer more today than they did in the past. Those who are in retirement from low-income jobs and who receive only a small pension, go more frequently to food distribution services, or Catholic Charities. This needs to be taken into account.

I would also like to mention the problem of the growing numbers of students at high school level and above who must take a job while they are in school; otherwise they are unable to pay for their studies. And for those who are unable to find work, the issue of student prostitution is becoming more and more common. This is a serious issue, even in the most prestigious universities.

With regard to housing, we need to mention the problem of **excessive debt** that results from the many opportunities that exist for buying on credit.

Another new variant of long-standing form of poverty is that of the different phases of emigration into France. Some **migrants**, especially those coming from North Africa, who are not completely inserted into French society, are reaching retirement age. There is no social fabric in place to allow them to be truly inserted into society as there was for the Polish, Italians, and many other foreigners who have come into our country.

I would ask you to reflect on what we offer today to young generations of migrants. They come because their parents have dreamed of having the same rights as the French do, to find a job and a decent home and so have a better standard of living than is possible in the country their parents left behind. However, there is no work, housing or equal rights for them.

One of the difficulties of the emigration policy is that young migrants have nothing to hope for as they see only the failures that their parents and grandparents have experienced. Their only recourse is to religion, and in this case it is Islam. I am perhaps oversimplifying things, but this helps explain the large groups of Islamic households in the outskirts of major cities which helps to keep them united.

So this social crisis also becomes, in part, a religious crisis. Here we have then a rough sketch of the forms of poverty in our city of Paris and also in the outlying regions.

II – ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE CHURCH IN PARIS

Faced with these difficult problems, the Church in Paris is taking a stand. In 1990, Cardinal Lustiger created the vicariate of solidarity comprising 8 episcopal vicariates, each with its own specific area of responsibility: family, youth, catechumenate, priests, foreign communities, etc.

In confiding this vicariate of solidarity to me, Bishop Andre Vingt-Trois insisted on 4 points:

- 1 – develop and encourage parish charitable committees,
- 2 – preside over the work of the Catholic diocesan commission for solidarity,
- 3 – be the link person for the health residences,
- 4 – hold meetings regularly with the leaders of the major charitable associations.

This vicariate has a **secretariat and two councils**:

* The **Catholic Diocesan Commission for Solidarity** has 8 members. The Commission reflects on broad questions such as: ‘solidarity winter’ (to provide accommodation for persons in need during times of very cold weather in parish locations and offer them hospitality), assistance to people with psychological problems, and development of an organisation to monitor poverty in Paris.

*** Diocesan Charity Council (CCD)**

CCD is an organisation for communion and reflection in common which brings together the major Church associations or Movements whose members are committed to local solidarity projects in Paris.

Today, solidarity is on three levels: local, diocesan and international.

At the local level, the parishes play a significant role.

The Church at parish level remains a fundamental place of proximity to those most in need, and so is a way to accompany them. For even if people are no longer practising their faith, they have this instinctive certainty that they will find help at a church. Everyone can find a church, but not everyone knows about the existence of Catholic Social Services or its address. The parishes have set up support services, clothing distribution, associations such as

“*Martha-Mary-Lazarus and friends*” whose members are responsible for creating files for persons who are undocumented, and accompany them to appointments at police headquarters for their documents for residency. They have also set up “*food pantries*” or food banks which provide basic food supplies at low cost. A family can fill a shopping trolley for 3.50 euro.

Parishes have set up numerous charitable services. The great challenge for all these services is to be able to work together. For example, in some parishes, those involved in the charitable organisations provide a monthly meal for people who live alone, another for those who are unemployed, etc. However, since there are few links between the various parishes, often the same persons can be found at all these sites. So a major difficulty for solidarity is working in common. The organisations “Mission Foundations” allow the various people involved in charitable work to meet together. As a result of this, each parish in Paris has established a **parish charity committee** to bring together those involved in charitable works in the same field, whether they are involved in the parish, or are from neighbourhood associations and services. This allows them to exchange information on different events, and to coordinate activities, schedules and resources.

For five years, these parish charity committees have become a valuable aid in discovering new forms of poverty and new types of need. For example, they have created a baggage storage site where people living on the streets can leave their belongings during the day. How can we remain on the look-out for new forms of poverty that appear in a particular area? As Church, we are able to bring about initiatives. However, in creating new projects, we need to be able to discontinue other ones because we cannot do everything. This is the goal of these charity committees which have a future and which are very important for the service of charity in Paris.

On the diocesan level, several associations have been created.

In 1981, Father Giros created the organisation called “*Liberty to Captives*” in order to make contact with people making a living on the streets and those living on the streets, including those who are homeless and those in prostitution. The principle behind this organisation is to go to people with empty hands, that is, to offer a caring relationship, freely given, but without giving a meal or social assistance. This organisation has 50 paid employees and hundreds of volunteers connected to a parish. Its activities are a great stimulus for the parish’s charitable works.

Many other social service programmes have been set up to provide housing, reinsertion through literacy programs, assistance to women and minors, etc. For example, the Tiberias House for persons with AIDS, the Hope Alliance Association which provides employment assistance, and temporary housing through organisations such as Saint Genevieve Association to accompany families in need of housing.

At international level, there are also numerous Church Services: *Catholic Charities, Caritas France, CCFD, Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Vincent Teams*. These are Church services whose networks extend beyond national boundaries.

III – CONVICTIONS - QUESTIONS

In conclusion, I would like to present to you several broad convictions and also some questions.

My convictions

1 – Charity is missionary by nature. Charity evangelises, and the poor evangelise us. One of the current dangers is the temptation to get wrapped up in actions that are more openly evangelising, such as formation or street evangelisation. Charity itself, however, is a distinctive feature of mission.

2 – We cannot delegate charity to professionals because charity is not a profession. This mission of charity is for all Christians. Charity is a natural result of faith, so every Christian is responsible for this mission, even if there are conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul or Catholic Charities in existence. Every Christian community must ask itself about its responsibility for putting this charity into practice.

3 – Although the right hand should not know what the left hand is doing, it is extremely important that charity be visible. Every community is called to be diaconal, as the Pope reminded us in his encyclical *Deus Caritas est*. Every community is called to live out this diaconal mission. Charity should be visible, not for the purpose of advancing our own prestige, but to advance the welfare of persons we serve, the poorest of the poor. Charity's visibility obliges us, as well, to avoid the tendency to hide the religious basis of all that we do. Some organisations think they will more easily receive assistance and public funding if they do not claim to be Christian. There is serious risk, however, that this could result in their losing their Christian values at the same time. We need local organisations that robust enough to be able to discuss issues with others, to negotiate and present Christian values in the decisions they must make. This is how the Church becomes visible.

The **festival of charity**, which took place last year, was intended to bring visibility to charity already at work in each community. In this way, it helped us be more aware of what already exists.

This year, the **charity forum** brought together those involved in associations, Church service programmes and parishes to participate in a day of dialogue, reflection and prayer with our archbishop and invited guests.

4 – It is important to bring about a shift of generations. Today, the world of solidarity is principally one of people aged 70 or over. This is an extraordinary generation of very committed activists who often know how to combine politics and charity. This generation is running out of steam, however, and some of their activities have stopped. The generation of 35-40 year olds relate quite differently to time and action. They often give a lot of time and effort to concrete actions (for example, distributing soup).

How will this generation be able to take up the baton from the preceding generation, so that their actions are anchored in the essential dimension of the spiritual, with a broader reflection on justice, and not just short-term, concrete activities? They need to be able to differentiate humanitarian efforts from charitable ones. This can only be done by deepening their reflection on the suffering Christ and in discovering the face of Christ in the face of the poor person. This requires spiritual investment. Our mission is to carry out the charity of Christ. However, this is only possible if we put into practice the charity of Christ which leads us to radically change our perspective on the world and on others. This **change of**

perspective will allow us to see and consider the poorest of the poor as Christ, as people who present Christ to us. Christian communities have to make a serious effort in this area.

MY QUESTIONS

1 – Is charity always efficacious? How can we avoid neglecting charitable actions in favour of projects that are more clearly profitable ? A municipal officer in a neighbourhood in Paris, a committed Christian, founded a programme “*Apartments in celebration, celebration of neighbours*”. Seeing the success of this endeavour, he wants to create “*neighbors in solidarity*” in order to create a vast solidarity movement in the large apartment buildings. This will be an invitation to experience a sense of solidarity and proximity rather than just a celebration that takes place once a year. It involves grocery shopping for neighbours who are sick, helping an elderly person, etc. This instinct is both simple and kind.

It is necessary, of course, to look for some level of efficacy within the structures that we put into place. But charity must first of all be productive before trying to be efficacious, because it is in the area of freely-given love. Taking the time to freely listen to a person living on the streets might not be efficacious in terms of profit. This is one of my questions.

The concept of charity has greatly evolved over time. Catholic Charities founded by Bishop Rodhain over 60 years ago, were first designed to give assistance: they gave money or food to those in need. Then, it moved from assistance to accompaniment. They no longer gave things directly, but rather tried to accompany people in order to reinsert them in society or to seek ways for them to find the money they needed. Today, we no longer act without involving the poor persons themselves. The movement Fourth-World ATD says that we need to give a voice to the poorest of the poor. Those who work in this Movement have the practice of taking the person they are helping with them when they have a meeting with a government official. That’s remarkable. However, the assessment of urgent needs is a very difficult matter today that must be taken into account.

2 – Another question is formation for those involved in charitable works. We have to make efforts to ensure that they serve generously but also with an awareness of human nature and the Gospel. In the encyclical *Deus Caritas est*, Benedict XVI speaks of heartfelt concern: “*human beings always need something more than technically proper care... They need heartfelt concern.*” The issue is to provide formation that develops this heartfelt concern by nurturing our spiritual life and taking a gospel-based approach.

3 – Another question is to know how to place greater emphasis on the diaconate of the Church, that is, the dimension of the service of the Church as a whole, which is not limited simply to charitable service, but also includes catechesis and the liturgy. The diaconate of the Church must extend to all its activities.

At the time of the “Diocesan Mission Foundations” the Catholics of Paris met to address one of 12 topics. At the conclusion of these Foundations, Cardinal Vingt-Trois established diocesan guidelines with objectives for each of the parishes in Paris, emphasising the importance of charity.

By way of conclusion, I believe that there is only one way we can speak about the poorest of the poor and our accompaniment of them on the local or international level. It is

through the deep and honest desire to change our own way of living. Nothing will change unless we change our own lifestyle.

Father Olivier RIBADEAU-DUMAS
Diocesan Director of the Apostolic Vicariate for Solidarity

WITH THE FOUNDERS, TODAY

Province of Granada (Spain)

Serving persons with AIDS in Malaga

Introduction

Until 1997, people who contracted AIDS were considered incurable, as they had a pathological condition previously unknown to medicine. They presented multiple symptoms: prolonged fever, weight loss, glandular disorders, etc. 1983 marked the discovery of the virus that causes AIDS, by a team led by Doctor Luc Montanier from the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Afterwards, the first international conference on AIDS took place in Atlanta in the United States in 1985, with the Luc Montanier's team as well as the team of Robert Gallo from the US city of Baltimore. At this time, there were no structures set up to care for AIDS patients other than hospitals. In 1987, the first antiretroviral HIV medication received authorisation to become available for sale.

Creation of our service to persons with AIDS

How did our service to people with AIDS come about? Many people participated in a process of reflection, decision-making and development of this event. We realise that it was God's action that motivated us and sent us forward into this mission. We believe that God will always support us in it.

In 1990, there were more than a million people worldwide with AIDS. In the hospitals in our area, patients came with a wide variety of symptoms. However, they could not be hospitalised for extensive periods or admitted into hospitals that were not equipped for the care they required. The only option for them was death.

When the hospital in Malaga admitted the first patients, the medical staff there were unable to provide for their care and so decided to ask help from the bishop in that city and from the Daughters of Charity.

The Provincial Council reflected on the request, discerned the possibilities and concluded that this was one of the forms of poverty of our day, and that Saint Vincent would have certainly responded to this appeal. The Council looked for a suitable place for the work and found a house owned by the bishop that had been used for summer camps. After the

necessary repairs, the house became a beautiful welcome centre surrounded by trees. The courtyard was transformed into a peaceful garden. The Centre would then admit patients with AIDS who were poor and lacking family support.

On April 22nd 1992, a community of four Daughters of Charity moved in and began this service, firmly committed to serving their brothers and sisters “in the sweat of their brow and the strength of their arms.”

This ministry began at a time when the conditions for AIDS transmission were not yet known. It was not clear if the disease was generally spread by sexual relations or if it was inherited. Nevertheless, the contagious characteristic of this illness was already recognised.

In the hospitals, the practice was for staff members to enter the patients’ rooms wearing gloves and a mask. This disease generally appeared among those who were part of an “at-risk population” (drug users, homosexuals, etc.).

The first patient welcomed into our Centre had been involved in prostitution in her youth, and was now more than forty years old. Her current companion would come every day to ask how she was doing, but did not dare come to visit her.

In the beginning, we had to combat the fear associated with everything that was being said about this illness. Everyone was very careful when they approached an AIDS patient. The care givers at times had to change the patients up to 15 times a day, due to chronic diarrhoea. Then, dermatological lesions (Kaposi syndrome) would appear on the patients’ faces. They had frequent fevers, perspired profusely, and grew weaker. Day after day, we would see them deteriorate inevitably towards death.

What could we do to deal with this situation that was going to end so badly? **Love and accompany them.** In their care and every other aspect, we were very attentive to the smallest detail. There was no other effective approach. In reality, we were providing palliative care. We recalled the words from 19th century medicine: in medicine, it is possible to “**cure sometimes, treat often, console always.**”

We could comfort them by changing their position, keeping their lips moist, offering them a drink of water or wiping away their perspiration... all the while striving to listen to them for this also brings comfort. How powerless we were against this threat to youth! For many of these patients were at that time about 35 years old.

We often reflected and prayed about the Gospel significance of these little gestures of care and the sign of solidarity through our presence. Our patients brought us back to the reality of suffering humanity calling out for hearts that are sensitive to suffering and loneliness. This in turn called us to be gentle and attentive, to listen peacefully and to be aware of their feelings. In this sort of accompaniment, we prayed with those who wished. We took every opportunity that arose to introduce them to God as a loving Father, full of mercy, always with respect for their religious or agnostic views

The scientific community continued its research into HIV, the way it develops and spreads, in order to find appropriate forms of treatment.

The rest of society remained divided in dealing with people who were ill: their fear of coming close to them led to a certain isolation. The patients and their families often hid the illness. No one dared to say that a member of their family had contracted HIV. They even asked us to keep their presence in the Centre a secret. We had to struggle a great deal to keep the media away in order to preserve the patients' privacy.

Attention to the families and attempts to re-establish relationships between them and their sick family member did not always meet with success. In some cases, such reconciliation was a help to the patient, but in other cases, it was impossible. Many young patients arriving at the Centre came from the world of drugs. They were no longer in contact with their families because of problems related to addiction: stealing, running away, leaving jobs, prison, fleeing from those who could help them, etc. All these events broke down family bonds.

In 1997, a new approach began to develop, and new forms of effective treatment began to appear. The results have been good, but the treatment is complicated and demanding. In order to see results, the therapy regime must be followed diligently, without ever stopping it. The Centre has been designed for this, offering hygiene and a healthy diet to help patients regain their strength. Thanks to these new forms of treatment, the individual's defence system can recuperate, and AIDS is no longer synonymous with death.

Since that time, we can imagine life for our patients, and think about reinsertion into society, and seeking employment. In the time they spend in the Centre, our patients participate in various activities with the help of instructors: theatre, journalism, cinema, computer training, remedial courses, data processing, etc. The involvement of our volunteers is exceptional. Some have been involved continuously over several years. This gives them a new outlook, new forms of activity, and provides friendships that help rebuild their self-esteem.

To sum up, from 1983 to 1990, this disease was discovered, but no one spoke about it and those who had it were kept hidden away. Between 1990 and 1997: legislation was introduced to require testing of blood before it was used for transfusion. From 1997 to 2000, efforts were made to reinsert people with AIDS back into the working world. Currently, we are striving to obtain social policies that will be to their advantage.

Now, our patients receive excellent treatment. Medications are expensive, but we can give them free of charge to those who are in need. On the other hand, society continues to consider AIDS a shameful and greatly feared disease, and marginalises those who contract it.

Today, as we look to the Company of the future, we know that we want to be servants of those who live in poverty, the unfortunate ones whose urgent human needs are not taken into account by society and economic structures. The Company that we want to create is one that serves Christ in the person of the poor "in the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms" in the spirit of Vincent and Louise.

Marguerite Naseau Community
Malaga (Spain)

WITH THE FOUNDERS IN OUR DAY

Province of Emmitsburg

Saint Vincent's Health Centre in Jacksonville, Florida

This article replaces the one published in the previous Echo because there was a mistake in the heading

Some background history

St. Vincent's Health Care in Jacksonville, Florida is part of the largest Catholic Healthcare System in the United States. However, St. Vincent's had a very humble beginning, as do most of the works of God.

During the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Daughters of Charity from Emmitsburg, Maryland, nursed the wounded and sick in camps along the St. John's River in Jacksonville. Remembering the Sisters' compassion and concern, a group of Jacksonville doctors with the support of the bishop, in 1916, invited the Sisters to come to Jacksonville to take over a hospital in the city, called De Sota Sanatorium. Shortly after their arrival, the Sisters renamed the institution St. Vincent's Hospital. People unfamiliar with the Sisters who wore the cornette, crossed to the other side of the street when they saw a Sister approaching. In those early days, the Sisters were viewed as an oddity in a southern city where Catholics were in the minority. The Sisters' dedication and commitment to seeing Christ's face in the poor and the underserved won them the respect and admiration of the citizens of Jacksonville, and in the ninety-four years the Daughters of Charity have served at St. Vincent's, their name is synonymous with their charism of service of the poor. Their leadership in healthcare is recognised and valued.

Today's challenges

In 2010, the hospital now known as St. Vincent's Health Care Centre, includes several different entities dedicated to maintaining health, as well as improving the condition of those who are sick. We give thanks to God for this great grace. There is now a second hospital, St. Luke's, in another area of the city that is functioning under the auspices of St. Vincent's. Long-term care for the elderly is provided at St. Catherine Labouré Manor, adjacent to St. Vincent's. Outpatient care is available in the main hospital, St. Vincent's, and in several clinics around the city and into southern Georgia, a neighbouring state to Florida.

Food for those in need is given by the Vincentian Outreach Programme, and small loans are available to associates (employees) who may require them. In all the Daughters of Charity hospitals in the United States, employees are known as associates, indicating their collaboration with the Sisters in caring for the sick and needy. St. Vincent's also sponsors an

Emergency Pregnancy Service where mothers-to-be who are in need of special assistance during their pregnancy, and who are encouraged to keep their baby, are helped with great consideration and respect for their privacy.

St. Vincent's Health Care has four mobile-medical vans. Their Mobile Health Ministry brings healthcare to migrant workers in several rural locations and to children in both Catholic and city schools whose parents cannot afford health care. Each van is staffed by a doctor, a nurse, a nutritionist, a social worker and volunteers. The Mobile Health/Rural Outreach programme reached more than 8,000 people last year and the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile served over 10,00 school children in the same year.

Statistics

Statistics can appear cold, but they also show the heart of the institution's care, and are required by many licensing and accreditation organisations. In 2009 St. Vincent's offered medical care to uninsured patients amounting to over \$14 million.

The Vincentian Outreach programme distributed food to the hungry, and approximately \$775,000 in financial aid to associates in need.

For many years, St. Vincent's has been sponsoring journeys to Haiti. Each year there are nine journeys made by medical personnel and other volunteers. St. Vincent's collected close to \$60,000 for the people of Haiti after the January 2010 earthquake. The hospital was able to send medical equipment, and technicians to install the equipment, at the St. Boniface Hospital in Fond du Blanc, Haiti. Additional visits have taken place to respond to the health needs of the people after the earthquake.

The Emergency Pregnancy Centre assisted nearly 4, 500 young women in 2009; 80% of these women decided against having an abortion after visiting the Centre.

340,000 housebound people were provided with a Thanksgiving meal and 106 families were helped at Christmas through the "Adopt a Family" programme.

The Good Samaritan Fund of St. Vincent's, St. Luke's and St. Catherine Labouré Manor paid out more than \$300, 000 to 2,500 patients in need during the past year. This fund helps patients who are being discharged from the hospital and need money, clothing and food to take with them. In total, \$33,000,000 was distributed to those in need.

Carrying out our mission

As Daughters of Charity and Associates serving at St. Vincent's Health Care, we are called to be mindful of those who are less fortunate; the uninsured, the under-insured; the hungry, the distressed, the unemployed, the troubled, lonely elderly people, children and the sick. It is this call to help others in need that makes St. Vincent's Health Care different. From the very beginning, the Sisters and their associates have carried out the Vincentian Mission. It is part of who we are at St. Vincent's.

Many associates volunteer to give their time in the outreach services mentioned above. Some of them give voluntary service before going to work in the morning while others do it during their lunch break. It is not unusual to see associates helping to stock and

organise the Vincentian food pantry at different times during the day. Doctors and other medical professionals who take time to serve the poor in Haiti pay their own travel expenses, and support others who wish to volunteer, but cannot afford the travel costs. Many volunteers helped with the “Adopt a Family” programme at Christmas and each department collected money or gifts to help a family in need. The food and nutrition department provided meals for the housebound at Thanksgiving and collaborated with Meals on Wheels and the Jacksonville Taxi Service whose employees volunteered to deliver the meals. Eighty taxi drivers participated in the deliveries. This project has continued for 20 years. Associates volunteer graciously when asked to respond to a need.

Induction to the mission

When new employees are inducted to work at St. Vincent’s, St. Luke’s or St. Catherine Labouré Manor, they are taught about the Mission of the Daughters of Charity and the history of the company from the time of Sts. Vincent and Louise. The employees learn that these two Saints are important to our Mission to the sick and those who are poor. Their feasts are celebrated along with those of Saint Catherine Labouré and Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton.

The five Daughters of Charity who are on mission at St. Vincent’s participate in the ministry of Healthcare and serve poor people in several different ways.

Sister Lucie Thai is a member of the Pastoral Care Team, visiting the sick, taking them Holy Communion, listening to them and bringing them comfort. She often visits patients after they leave hospital, especially if they have no one else to do this.

Sister Clare Marie, who is Sister Servant of the Local Community, serves in Mission Integration at St. Luke’s Hospital, sharing the Vincentian Mission and helping to develop a Spirituality in the Workplace for the leadership team and other associates. This involves formation in the Vincentian Spirit and Mission.

Sister Joan is involved with the St. Vincent’s Foundation. This department raises funds so that the many outreach services of the Healthcare System are able to continue. This type of work is directly related to that of St. Vincent and its aim is to let benefactors participate in Vincentian works.

Sister Patricia is directly involved with those in need through Vincentian outreach in the food pantry, giving assistance to anyone who comes to her in need. She is also able to help associates who are facing a financial crisis in their families. Sometimes this is by a direct donation and other times it is given in the form of a loan which can be paid back when the person is able to do this.

Sister Virginia Ann serves in the Mission Integration department of St. Vincent’s Hospital, developing programmes of formation that teach associates about the Vincentian Mission and the core values of the Health System. These programmes, as well as those at St. Luke’s, are directly related to the Health System’s Mission of Service to the poor.

The Sisters feel that the service they give to those who are poor through their work at St. Vincent’s, St. Luke’s and St. Catherine Labouré Manor “nourishes their contemplation and gives meaning to their community life, just as their relationship with God and their life in common continually revitalises their apostolic commitment.” (C. 16b)

There is no doubt that the Daughters of Charity serving at St. Vincent's Health Care in Jacksonville are carrying out the work that St. Vincent and St. Louise decided should be the principal work of the Company from the very beginning. They strive to respond to the corporal and spiritual needs of people in poverty, as well as training and encouraging others to do the same.

The Jacksonville Community

APPOINTMENTS

Designation of Visitatrices and appointment of Provincial Directors

PROVINCE OF AUSTRIA: Sister Elfriede Magdalena POMWENGER was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Angelika PAUER, 7th April 2010.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SAINT LOUISE: Sister Concepcion VIVIENTE CORE was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Maria Cruz GUTIERREZ MARTIN, 7th April 2010.

PROVINCE OF IRELAND: Sister Catherine PRENDERGAST was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 7th April 2010.

PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Sister Gloria ANIEBONAM was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Francesca EDET, 23rd April 2010.

PROVINCE OF THAILAND: Sister Consolacion EATA was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Josefina ESTREMER, 23rd April 2010.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SAINT VINCENT: Sister Maria del Carmen ZABALLOS LOSADA was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 2nd June 2010.

PROVINCE OF PAMPLONA: Sister Soledad GARCIA IMAS was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Presentacion URRICELQUI YOLDI, 16th June 2010.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AFRICA: Sister Maria Remedios LOPEZ SORLOZANO was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Sabina IRAGUI, 12th July 2010.

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Father Patrick GRIFFIN was named Director General for six years, 21st October 2010.

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PROVINCE OF SWITZERLAND-TURKEY: Father Yves BOUCHET was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 29th April 2010. Father Semaan JAMIL was appointed Sub-Director for the Community of the Hospital of Peace in Istanbul, 29th April 2010.

PROVINCE OF FRANCE-NORTH: Father Pierre CORNEE was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 29th April 2010.

PROVINCE OF SIENNA: Father Giancarlo PASSERINI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 29th April 2010.

PROVINCE OF THE NETHERLANDS: Father Jan Van BROEKHOVEN was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 11th May 2010.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AMERICA: Father Ismar de Leon HERNANDEZ was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 24th May 2010.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SAINT LOUISE: Father Antonio Molina SALMERON was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 16th July 2010.

PROVINCE OF MOZAMBIQUE: Father Weldeghebriel AMINE was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 17th September 2010.

PROVINCE OF BOGOTA: Father Luis Alfonso STERLING MOTTA was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 26th October 2010.

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of the Canary Islands (Spain)

The Community of Corralejo

Corralejo is in the district called "La Oliva" in the northern part of the island of Fuerteventura (one of the seven islands in the archipelago of the Canary Islands.) In addition to the small city of Corralejo, this district includes 9 towns. The district's population varies greatly. Currently, it has more than 20,000 inhabitants, with 15,000 in Corralejo. This includes people from over 80 different nationalities and the town population is constantly changing.

Our community is made up of four Sisters who have retired from professional ministry. The community began in Corralejo in 1975 with "Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Social Services". From the time of their arrival, the Daughters of Charity set up teams of the Miraculous Medal Association (AMM) which are still active today. A dozen statues of the Blessed Virgin are passed from house to house as the families make a commitment to pray and to gather with other families each month for a time of formation. All four of us serve in the parish as well as with families and persons who are elderly, sick, immigrants or homeless. We work in collaboration with a lay woman hired by the Company and with seven

lay volunteers. We have a contract with the municipal council of Fuerteventura to assist with “The Programme for Elderly Persons in the North Region.” The social worker in the mayor’s office coordinates our ministry: we visit families to learn of their needs for medical supplies, such as a hospital bed, wheelchair, etc. Then we help them make the arrangements with Social Security to obtain what they need. In the event of their death, we try to recover the equipment so that others may benefit from it.

Last year, our community also became involved with the retention centre for immigrants in Fuerteventura which is located in the former barracks of the Foreign Legion. Each morning, a Sister would go to the centre as a nurse, taking care of health needs and giving Spanish classes. However, the centre was closed last October.

One of our Sisters works with Catholic Social Services since so many families are unemployed and are in great poverty. Another Sister visits elderly persons in their homes and patients in the hospital. She brings Communion to those who wish, and when someone asks to see a priest, she arranges these visits as well. She also transports elderly persons who are not able to drive themselves to medical appointments and laboratory tests. With the mayor’s wife, she is also involved in a project to serve in a day centre for elderly persons that will be opening soon.

All four of us are very involved in our parish. One Sister is in charge of the sacristy and the altar linen, and another Sister animates the liturgies and accompanies the burial services. These are very important occasions for ministering to people in their time of suffering. A third Sister works as a catechist in the programme called “awakening faith.” Every two weeks, she also meets with 35 mothers who participate in family catechesis. One afternoon per week, she and two volunteers from AMM organise a time of prayer for all those who wish to pray together. Finally, the fourth Sister works in the parish archives and in baptism preparation classes. We also work with people who are homeless to try to help them to be reunited with their families. Unfortunately, sometimes these efforts are unsuccessful.

In the course of our visits, we meet and involve others interested in helping us with our mission. For more than five years, Rosi, a widow who lives alone since all her children are married, has helped us a great deal. She spends hours at Catholic Social Services sorting and handling clothing donations. Luis and Emerita drive us to nearby towns. Carmen, our neighbour who works in the sacristy and does much home visiting, always says she doesn’t do enough. Finally, Masi, the youngest, an English teacher, was touched by our way of serving others and wanted to become involved. Now, she is amazed to discover God in those she meets.

Finally, we included in our common plan that we want our local community to always be a place of listening for all who are in need. We are so happy to be able to continue our service of Christ in people who are sick or in difficulty.

The Sisters of the Corralejo community

SPECIAL 350TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THE FOUNDERS

Louise de Marillac – Foundress

The events of history serve as lessons for the future and give us the opportunity to reflect and meditate on our heritage. Vincent de Paul was part of this great history... and what about Louise de Marillac?

Introduction

Mystery surrounds her childhood since she never knew her mother, and we have no definite information about the place of her birth. From her early childhood, her life was marked by hidden suffering: “... *from my birth...He has hardly ever left me, at any age, without some occasion of suffering.*”¹ Her destiny was in God’s hands; the obscurity of her future would become clear over time. Louise’s life would become inflamed by the heart of Christ **as she formed servants for the poor**. For this reason, Pope Pius XII, while he was still a cardinal, was able to say on the day of her canonisation: “*She, Louise de Marillac, ensured your expansion through her concern, her words, her vigilant care and her untiring example of heroism, even when you were only a little flock ...*”

Louise was formator, organiser, and spiritual guide. How did all this come about in the 17th century known in history for its two extremes: the rich and the poor, the debauchery of those called the Great and the mystique of those who were poor, something that Saint Vincent de Paul transformed into the **mystique of action**?

After Paris had been ravaged by the plague, the beginning of the 17th century plunged France into an anarchy of civil wars. This led to licentiousness, ignorance among the people, and a slackening of discipline among the clergy and in monasteries. Paris was filled with countless multitudes of beggars, adventurers, and people willing to take any risk, all of whom ruled the streets when darkness fell. Poverty and misery became entrenched.

At the same time, a powerful response began to rise up in the hearts of some people. These generous souls sought a remedy for these ills: some in the cloistered life through a more purified way of living of the gospel, others in the world who became **providence for those in want**. **Louise de Marillac** had her place among these generous hearts. After waiting long years for a sign from God, Louise’s soul that thirsted for commitment, renunciation and perfection would be mysteriously guided by God.

FROM THE TIME OF HER BIRTH TO HER INTRODUCTION TO M. VINCENT

The limited information we have about Louise’s preparation for carrying out God’s plan for her is not biographical, but recounts a few events that tell us about Louise’s circumstances as she waited for God’s moment to come. This preparation, which began at the

¹ *Spiritual Writings*, A29, p711

time of her birth, continued to the end of her life. The de Marillac family had reached the height of its power. The least well known among them was Louise's father, a Councillor of the Parliament, who spared nothing of what was useful to form this child in the "exercises of body and mind" during her early years..

On August 15th 1591, Louis de Marillac made a notarized contract in order to provide this newborn child with an annual allowance and an inheritance of land located in the Ferrieres territory. This notarised document was immediately followed by a letter addressed to a "cousin of his who was a religious at Poissy" named Louise de Marillac. The letter has not been preserved, and so we do not know how old Louise was when she arrived at the Saint Louis royal monastery in Poissy. In those days, however, it would not have been unusual for a very young girl to be confided to a monastery for her education, especially if a member of her family were part of the monastery community.²

Louise's early childhood was nurtured in this religious atmosphere and her soul blossomed in an environment where God had His place. Here Louise began her studies in a very advanced intellectual culture: catechism, liturgy and literature were closely interconnected. Sister Marillac, Louise's relative, was among the most cultivated religious in this monastery. She translated into French the Office of the Blessed Virgin and the penitential psalms, and wrote meditations for all the feasts throughout the year as well as a commentary on the Cantic of Canticles. This information has led Mother Poissenet to conclude that these literary gifts were placed at the service of an authentic and profound spiritual life.³ Here at the royal monastery of Poissy, Louise learned to read and write, to acquire understanding of Latin, Sacred history, and the stories of the saints. Consequently, at a very early age, she encountered God, learning to pray to Him, love Him and see Him revealed in the tattered rags of poor people..

At some point, her father withdrew her from Poissy and placed her in the care of a capable and virtuous woman in order to teach her, in the words of Gobillon, "*suitable training in household skills*". Gobillon adds, however, that her father spared nothing that would contribute to advancing her formation. Discovering her great intellectual potential, he had her study philosophy to form her reasoning skills and give her entry into the highest levels of knowledge. "*This gave her such a love of reading that it was the most ordinary of occupations for her.*" With regard to painting, "*she had such a leaning towards this fine art that she continued to practice it in the different stages of her life...*"⁴

Louise became a boarder in Paris, for her family home was not generally open to her. On certain days, she would see her father, a cultivated man who quickly recognised Louise's intellectual potential and her interest in profound subjects and serious issues. At the end of his life, he wrote in his testament: "*she had been my greatest consolation in the world, and I believe she had been given to me by God to calm my spirit in the afflictions of life.*"⁵ When her father died in 1604, God alone remained for Louise. Impulsively and with enthusiasm, she decided she wanted to enter the Capuchins. Seeing her frail health, Father Honore de Champigny asked her to withdraw her request, adding, "*God has some other design on you*"⁶ one which had not yet been revealed.

² *De l'anxiété à la sainteté* by Mother Poissenet p. 3. (*From anxiety to holiness*, not available in English)

³ *De l'anxiété à la sainteté* by Mother Poissenet p. 4. (*From anxiety to holiness*, not available in English)

⁴ Gobillon, p. 3.

⁵ Cf. Gobillon, p. 3.

⁶ Cf. Gobillon, p. 4.

Between the years 1604 and 1613, much information remains unclear. The de Marillac's had little interest in removing from obscurity a young woman who, while not disowned by her family, was not included in the family genealogy. As the world pushed her away, God drew her close. During this time... **her uncles and aunts sought a match for her.**

They chose someone for her from the queen's entourage. On February 5th, 1613 in the church of Saint-Gervais, Louise married Antoine Le Gras, a court secretary to Queen Marie de Medicis, and became known in society as **Mademoiselle Le Gras**. The couple moved into the Saint-Merry parish. Michel was born at the end of 1613 and was baptised at Saint-Merry.

Time passed quickly! Antoine Le Gras became seriously ill and Louise fell into a serious depression which lasted until Pentecost. She wrote of "*the doubt I had as to whether I should leave my husband, as I greatly wanted to do, in order to make good my first vow and to have greater liberty to serve God and my neighbour.*"⁷ On June 4th 1623, the feast of Pentecost, during Mass in the church of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, **light dawned.**

Monsieur Le Gras died on December 21st 1625. Louise was left alone with a 12-year-old son. Her suffering was intense. By the grace of God, Monsieur Vincent became the guide Louise had glimpsed in her Light of Pentecost. Over time, he introduced her to the service of the poor through the Confraternities of Charity. This was the prelude to the words of Father Honore, that "**God had some other plan for her which had not yet been made known.**"

This long introduction was necessary to understand clearly the preparation to do God's will that took place in the physical and spiritual life of Louise. **To be and to do** would become her daily bread as she accepted God's will, living in the century of charity in action, in the company of those who helped her move out of her self-absorption..

After the inner turmoil of her husband's death, a degree of calm allowed Louise to organise her life. She moved out of the luxurious home she had established with Antoine Le Gras and into a simpler apartment. She prayed and she read. At that time in history, pious persons nourished their spiritual life by reading spiritual books. She and her husband had received the rare privilege of reading Sacred Scripture together! Jean-Pierre Camus, bishop of Belley, had given the written permission on May 8th 1623 for the couple to read the Bible together in its French version translated by the Doctors of Louvain.⁸

This 17th century was also the century of charity. Love of neighbour developed as a necessary consequence of love of God, and good works were to be carried out in the light of faith. Louise included this in her rule of life.⁹ The example for this came from the highest levels of society. Queen Anne of Austria was said to have had a deep love for the poor. The intensity of the Queen's charity took various forms and can be seen in her relationship with M. Vincent which was strengthened at the time of the death of the Queen's husband, Louis XIII. A historian who wrote "Charitable Activities of a Queen of France", referring here to Anne of Austria, reported the following: "*The day after the death of the King, M. Vincent was preparing to return to St. Lazare, when the queen stopped him, saying: 'Do not abandon*

⁷ SW, A. 2, p. 1.

⁸ Jean-Pierre Camus, *évêque de Belley*, p. 80. Edition Cèdre (France – not available in English).

⁹ SW, A. 1, p. 689, Rule of Life in the World.

me; I confide my soul to you. I want to love and serve God.”¹⁰ She made a retreat under his direction. From then on, the two names were closely linked in the organisation of charity. The author states that it is difficult to know what should be attributed to one or the other of them, so close was their collaboration. When the initiative came from the Queen, she confided its implementation to M. Vincent through his missionaries and the Sisters. We find these benevolent activities at all the crossroads of misery in the 17th century.

The reasons for the rapid expansions of works in favour of persons who were poor and sick were fundamentally due to a keener sense of human solidarity, to use a modern term. Its source was a deepening of Christian life, and a rediscovery of the **eminent dignity of poor persons**. Bossuet, along with many others, repeated this idea frequently in several of his sermons. Louise de Marillac, in her solitude, participated discreetly in this expansion of works for the poor and committed herself to **servicing the poorest of the poor**.

In 1619, she met Francis de Sales who was detained in Paris as he had various matters to attend to, and he was a friend of Michel de Marillac. He recognised Mademoiselle Le Gras from among the ladies of society who came to hear him preach, since he must have ascended the pulpit more than 300 times. Knowing she was suffering from depression, he even had the kindness, one day, to visit her in her home. He was aware that she suffered from depression. Nothing was more in contrast to the temperament of this gentle bishop. He could only exhort her with a few words that he used with other people in similar circumstances: “we must not just dabble in the exercise of virtue, we must go towards it wholeheartedly, boldly, in simplicity and freedom as it were”

Before he returned to Savoy, Francis de Sales asked Jean-Pierre Camus to keep an eye on Louise. The direction that Bishop Camus provided her seems to have been very wise in spite of the controversy his vague style of writing provoked, inspiring some people and disturbing others. Bishop Camus turned out to be a valued director for Louise de Marillac. This direction coincided with a very difficult period in Louise’s life. The letters they exchanged during this time demonstrate her confidence in his direction as well as his high regard for her: “*recollection and spiritual retreats... in your case are to be taken like honey, rarely and moderately. For you have a certain spiritual greed that needs to be restrained.*”¹¹

After 1625, when Jean-Pierre Camus returned to Belley and rarely returned to Paris, he advised his directee to choose another director. Did he confide her to M. Vincent? It seems that he DID NOT. God took care of that in Louise’s vision in Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs: **M. Vincent** whom Francis de Sales esteemed as a true man of God.

After the death of her husband, a new life began for Louise. She made a retreat, with her new director giving her a framework and subjects for meditation. Louise met him each day to give an account of her prayer, for he wanted to know if God was speaking to her, and he wanted her to recognise that it was God who was speaking. Louise came out of her solitude, thanks to the prudent and patient direction of M. Vincent. Slowly and surely, she understood God’s plans for her.

LOUISE DE MARILLAC, FORMATOR AND SPIRITUAL GUIDE

¹⁰ *Les œuvres de charité en France au 17^e siècle*, p. 7. [Works of Charity in France in the 17th Century]

¹¹ Gobillon, p. 5.

It all began in 1626! Louise had come to a decision: a shift away from herself to God and to God for those who were poor. When she communicated her firm conviction to M. Vincent, he congratulated her and ended his letter saying: *“Oh! what a tree you have appeared to be today in God's sight, since you have borne such a fruit! May you be forever a beautiful tree of life bringing forth fruits of love!”*¹²

In overcoming her focus on self, Louise acquired a firmness of spirit, self-discipline and balance which enabled her to take on many responsibilities. Her organisational skills allowed her to recognise shortcomings in the Charities. In dialogue with M. Vincent, both were convinced that the **charity needed servants** who, in order to serve, had to be trained technically, morally and spiritually, and they needed constant direction and support.

The process of addressing this need began to unfold...

The hour of God, Pentecost 1623... Louise was flooded with an extraordinary grace that she called Light: *“I was advised ... that a time would come when I would be in a position to make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and that I would be in a small community where others would do the same ...”*¹³ This grace took on concrete form on November 29th, 1633. After hesitations and with the help of the Holy Spirit to dissipate the clouds, M. Vincent gave Louise permission to form the servants of the poor **in her home**. Never abandoning her, he helped guide the training she gave. Around 1632, Vincent sent a brief note to her: *“Draw up the rule; then I shall go over it and do what you asked me. Tell me the obstacles that you fear.”*¹⁴

The formation of the young women was the work of both of them. An area in which the two founders were in complete agreement was applying the Gospel to the service of poor persons. M. Vincent reminded the little community of this in a conference he gave to them on September 19th 1649 on the Love of God: *“Sisters, the subject of the present conference is the love of God, which is found in today's Gospel ... ‘You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, etc.’ (Mt 22:3).”* The Sister who recorded the conference, Sister Elisabeth Helot, added: *“Our Lord allowed himself to be asked this to have the opportunity to give us the instruction included in today's Gospel. In line with that, Mlle Le Gras judged it advisable for us to study this topic ...”*¹⁵

On November 29th 1633, the women came together. Soon after, others would join them. Louise had reflected on the formation plan for them. Within the small council of the Company, she would explain several points in this plan, noting the conditions for admission and the specific details for formation, for, as M. Vincent stressed: *“To be Daughters of Charity is to be daughters of God, daughters belonging entirely to God.”*¹⁶

Throughout her entire life, Louise oversaw the recruitment of Sisters in fidelity to the conditions for admission that had been established from the very beginning. M. Vincent voiced his agreement in Council meetings as well in the conferences he gave when the Sisters came together: *“Now, to be true Daughters of Charity, it's necessary to have left everything: father, mother, possessions, and the hope of establishing a household. This is what the Son of*

¹² Coste I, L. 27, p. 46

¹³ SW, A. 2, p. 1

¹⁴ Coste I, L. 122, p. 174.

¹⁵ Conference of September 19th 1649, Coste IX, p. 365.

¹⁶ Conference of July 5th 1640, Coste IX, p. 13-14.

God teaches in the Gospel. We also have to renounce ourselves; for, if we leave all things, but retain our own wills and don't renounce ourselves, nothing has been done."¹⁷

In the first conference on the spirit of the Company, M. Vincent insisted: *"It's important for Daughters of Charity to know in what this spirit consists, just as it's important for a person setting out on a journey to know the route to the place she wants to go."*¹⁸ The following week, addressing the same topic, he said: *"I repeat once again, Sisters, that the spirit of your Company consists in the love of Our Lord, love of persons who are poor, love of one another, humility, and simplicity."*¹⁹

As M. Vincent was concluding the conference, Mademoiselle Le Gras said to him, *"Father, I beg you to offer us to God so that we may enter fully into this spirit, and ask Him to forgive us the faults we've committed against this same spirit."*²⁰

In agreement with Mademoiselle Le Gras, M. Vincent reminded the Sisters on various occasions, beginning on July 31st 1634, of the principles the two of them had developed. This helped prepare the Sisters to be sent to places where they would teach, and take every opportunity to learn the means of growing in holiness: *"how important it is for a sister to be well formed in what she must do when she is sent to a certain place...you must take great care because it is very important to be well formed while you are here, in all that you need to know and to pay close attention to what is said to you. And since you cannot remain here for very long, you must remain attentive in the short time that you are here."*²¹

Another point of emphasis concerned **the instruction of the poor** in matters necessary for their salvation: *"therefore, the Sisters themselves have to be instructed first before being able to teach others."*²² For the Sisters in the parishes, he insisted: *"You must strive to learn how to teach catechism properly to the children."*²³

M. Vincent used his correspondence with Mademoiselle Le Gras to explain certain issues of day-to-day formation when his presence was not required: *"It would be well for you to tell them what constitutes solid virtue, especially that of **interior and exterior mortification** of our judgment, our will, memories, sight, hearing, speech, and the other senses, of the attachments we have to bad, useless, and even to good things; all this for the love of Our Lord Who acted in this way. You will have to strengthen them a great deal in all these matters, especially in the virtue of obedience and in that of indifference... It would be well for you to tell them that they must be helped to acquire this virtue of mortification and given practice in it. I shall also tell them so that they will be well disposed to it."*²⁴

The formation programme was dense, solid, and never something that was achieved once and for all. Rather, formation was a work in progress. To encourage Mademoiselle, he wrote to her in 1634: *"I think that you have enough young women for some time and that you should train them well to read and sew so that they can work in the country."*²⁵

¹⁷ Conference of July 5th 1640, Coste IX, p. 13.

¹⁸ Conference of February 2nd 1653, Coste IX, p. 457.

¹⁹ Conference of February 9th, 1653, Coste IX, p. 468.

²⁰ Conference of February 9th, 1653, Coste IX, p. 470.

²¹ Paraphrases from 4 Conferences: July 31st 1634, January 1st 1654, March 16th 1659, December 8th 1658

²² Conference of March 16th 1659, Coste X, p. 503.

²³ Conference of December 8th 1658, Coste X, p. 499.

²⁴ Coste I, L. 156a, p. 223-224.

²⁵ Coste I, L. 167, p. 239.

The number of women who entered the Company continued to increase, and so did the works asked of them. Louise named a **Seminary Directress** to assist in formation. In a Council meeting in March 1648, M. Vincent set out the following challenge: *“And you, Sister, who are in charge of our new Sisters, help them to understand clearly how to make their prayer on the subject of a conference, and the reasons for doing a certain thing. ... In a word, Sister, it’s your duty to help them to be able to do this.”*²⁶

The thoughts of Louise de Marillac regarding formation were not explicitly set down in a treatise on the subject. Rather, they can be found in her correspondence with M. Vincent, the Abbe de Vaux, Brother Ducourneau and the Sister Servants in the various foundations over the years, according to circumstances. Louise was clear and specific in her personal writings and in the advice she gave that has been made known to us through her first biographer, Father Gobillon, as well as later historians. Some remarks she made on the duty of being instructed focuses on the consequences of neglecting this: *“It takes great temerity for a sister to act without knowing how she should conduct herself. There is always the danger of offending God when one is uncertain how to behave.”*²⁷

When expressing her concern about the Sisters being authentic Daughters of Charity: she advised them, *“always to be disposed to respond to holy obedience with the view of accomplishing the will of God.”*²⁸ Louise also recommended the Sisters to have *“great affection and devotion to your three quarters of an hour instruction each day, for this is a very important and necessary activity so that you can be instructed in what you are required to do.”*²⁹

CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR ADMISSION

To the Abbe de Vaux, in 1640, Louise talked about accepting candidates if it were God’s will, interested in accepting only those who had been called. Later, she added the need for good health, courage, solid convictions, and perseverance. She wrote to the Abbe de Vaux in June 1641: *“You know how cautious one must be not to admit into a community those who are not suited for it.”* She added that their motives must be verified: *“Please be careful that their desire to come is not motivated by a wish to see Paris...”*³⁰

The importance of knowing the candidate: *“I think that I would be almost as hesitant about a person who, for whatever reason, would fear nothing, as about one who, moved by human prudence, would want to be reassured.”*³¹

For this reason, in the discernment of vocation, it is important to consider the purity of a person’s intention: desire to be loyal, good will, aptitudes for serving and to be clear about the demands involved. *“...they should be warned that if they do not live up to their promises, they will be sent back or they will have to find employment as domestics. I am telling you this, Monsieur, but they must commit a serious fault before that will happen.”*³²

²⁶ Coste XIIIb, p. 302.

²⁷ SW, A. 60, p. 788.

²⁸ SW, A. 60, p. 788.

²⁹ *Ecrits spirituels*, p. 959; 1961 French edition, not in English.

³⁰ SW, L. 45, p. 53.

³¹ SW, L. 47, p. 33.

³² SW, L. 106, p. 37.

M. Portail was in Le Mans, and Louise wrote to him in March 1646 in response to a suggestion he had made: *“I believe this to be necessary [that girls wishing to join the Company come to Paris] so that we might be able to send you four of our sisters from here. Although they may seem to you to be entirely **submissive**, it is to be feared, Monsieur, that in the exercise of their duties **they may belie their reason for being there** and that this could become habitual in other places.”*³³

In Angers, Louise wrote to him about the need for Sisters for the works, but also the need for candidates to be suitable... *“I also beg you, Monsieur, to let me know the agreement you made with the administrators and with this girl you are sending us from the hospital. Is it purely so that she may be one of us, without the obligation to send her back except in the manner we do with others?”* Later in the same letter, she adds: *“You know how we need them, but you also know how necessary it is that they have all the proper dispositions. I beg you either to **receive them or to turn them away**.”*³⁴ A final letter to M. Portail in Le Mans specifies: *“...I urge you most humbly to find out as much as you can about the girls who must come to you if they wish to join us.”*³⁵

As formator, Louise also kept the Sister Servants updated about recruitment. Her correspondence with them indicates dates, conditions of acceptance, trial periods and rejections.

Barbe Angiboust received the following brief commentary: *“your good little girl...**is not suitable for us**...it would be better for her to make a decision when she reaches a mature age...”*³⁶

The young women deemed suitable needed to get to know the Sisters before being accepted in order for these to assess their personality and for the recruits to understand that lifestyle and service took on different forms in different areas. The letter to Jeanne Lepintre is clear: *“...you must be careful to point out to her that there is a great difference between the life and work of our sisters in the houses in the parishes of Paris and the countryside and the life of those sisters working in the hospitals.”*³⁷

*“I believe, my dear Sister, that you will see to it that no one tells her tales if she is frequently going to be spending entire days at your house. To that end, in your little conferences, urge the sisters to think of the example they are obliged to give her. Test her well so that we are not constrained to send her back.”*³⁸

Sister Cécile-Agnès received a letter regarding some young women she was to send to Paris *“if you consider them suitable ... However, we do not need any **do-nothings, chatterboxes**, or girls who think they can come to Paris under the pretext of being a Daughter of Charity when they have no intention whatsoever of serving God or of perfecting*

³³ SW, L. 132 C, p. 144.

³⁴ SW, L. 138, p. 148.

³⁵ SW, L. 140, p. 150.

³⁶ SW, L. 181B, p. 248.

³⁷ SW, L. 214, p. 398.

³⁸ SW, L. 214, p. 398.

themselves. It is precisely what leads us to send them back, or leads them to leave your establishment."³⁹

Louise de Marillac studied all the vocation requests very carefully as well as what followed from them. She said to the Abbe de Vaux: *"take the trouble of interviewing them to discover their motivation. Try to **find out if the constant chatter** of the one about whom you wrote to me is not due to the frivolity and **habits she contracted in the household where she worked**. This attitude would certainly not be suitable for us. We accept no one if there is the slightest suspicion that she has fallen. This is certainly too important for all the daughters.*"⁴⁰

As formator, Louise did not hesitate to ask the Sister Servants about how they got to know the candidates or even how they dealt with their families, if there was a need to do so: *"Sister, please let me know whether or not you explained everything to Mademoiselle Chevalier. Did you lead her to believe that she would be exempt from many things and that we would keep her despite her infirmities? Did you speak with her mother and tell her the same thing? Until now this young woman gives no sign of being suited for us either physically or mentally... she would be much better off in her home surroundings than in this city where she is always ill.*"⁴¹

In the Council meeting of October 30th 1647, M. Vincent repeated what had been agreed upon: *"It's a question of forming young women who can serve God in the Company, helping them to put down deep roots of virtue, teaching them submission, mortification, humility, and the practice of their Rules and of every virtue.*"⁴²

The two founders were unwaveringly committed to doing God's will and following divine Providence. In 1654, Louise described to the Abbe de Vaux the difficult time they were experiencing in formation, to which he was so committed: *"Since the war, we have had great difficulty in finding girls who are suitable for our works. Many, after being fully trained, allow themselves to be carried away by self-interest and leave the Company so that they may enjoy greater freedom. Because of this we have been short of sisters for the past few years.*"⁴³

COUNCIL AND FORMATION

Everything needs to proceed according to its right time: each stage has its beginning, progression and end. It is a mistake to always want to give up at the beginning. Mademoiselle Le Gras was convinced of this from daily experience, and M. Vincent advised and encouraged her: *"Our good Sisters here are doing well" and "If Our Lord gives you some inspiration concerning Barbe's taking charge, make use of her..."*⁴⁴

Some periods of darkness in this formation were dealt with through correspondence, while others were reflected on and decided upon in Council. On June 18th 1646, there was a discussion about the need to dismiss one of the Sisters. After asking the Sisters' opinion, M. Vincent continued: *"And what does Mlle. Le Gras have to say about this?"* Mademoiselle

³⁹ SW, L. 323, p. 253-254.

⁴⁰ SW, L. 103, p. 35.

⁴¹ SW, L. 391, p. 440.

⁴² Coste XIII B, p. 294-295.

⁴³ SW, L. 401, p. 459 (Original autograph letter in the Archives of the Company).

⁴⁴ Coste I, L. 425, p. 24.

said that “*she really should be sent away because keeping someone so self-willed here in this house would give bad example to the others. Moreover, there was no guarantee that she would remain at peace, since, at the first whim that seized her, she might start up as before... If, however, she herself wanted to withdraw, either to her own village or elsewhere, and work to earn her living, the Company could help her in some way to support herself.*”⁴⁵

Another case for dismissal was dealt with more brusquely. M. Vincent decided: “*...do this by tomorrow morning so that she will not have the time to put together an intrigue like the others ... Would you believe that she gave Jacqueline a slap in the face? ... And what is worse, she informed the Lenten preacher of some of the faults of the Ladies...*”⁴⁶ “*Jeanne, dismiss her and tell her it is because she struck her companion... the scandal would be too great if it were said of the Daughters of Charity that they fight like cats and dogs,*” added M. Vincent.⁴⁷

A few words in an undated letter from M. Vincent to Mademoiselle were meant to console her about this matter and preserve her peace of mind: “*You seem depressed. You are afraid that God is angry and wants none of the service you are rendering Him ... Since you agree, I shall send for that young woman, Jeanne, or, if you know where she is, please send her to me.*”... He ends by adding: “*In the name of God, Mademoiselle, love your poverty and be at peace. It is the greatest honour you can render right now to Our Lord, Who is tranquility itself.*”⁴⁸

These two examples were extreme cases, but 1637 and the following years continued with difficulties that needed to be resolved in order to remain faithful to the formation plan that Louise had established. M. Vincent offered his assistance, studied the circumstances, and suggested or called for a solution: “*I think it is well for you to act cautiously in this matter, but firmly and effectively.*”⁴⁹

In one letter, he was emphatic: “*If Barbe wants to enter a religious order, please invite her very calmly to make up her mind about it. She will soon tire of it, or the Order of her. As for that other young woman from the Hotel-Dieu, it is better to dismiss her sooner rather than later. The longer you wait, the more commotion her exit will cause. Be well informed about the truth of the matter...*”⁵⁰

LOUISE DE MARILLAC WITH THE SISTERS IN FORMATION

“*You did not create yourselves, my Sisters, it is she who created you and gave birth to you in Our Lord!*” These words were written by Marguerite Chetif in a reflection preserved in the Archives of the Company.

“*God has chosen village girls...*”⁵¹ God said to them: “*Come...work...pray...*”

⁴⁵ Coste XIII B, p. 243 (hand-written Council minutes in the Archives of the Company).

⁴⁶ Coste I, L. 312, p. 449.

⁴⁷ Coste I, L. 386, p. 560.

⁴⁸ Coste I, L. 387, p. 561 (Original autograph letter in the Archives of the Company).

⁴⁹ Coste I, L. 388, p. 563.

⁵⁰ Coste I, L. 279, p. 390.

⁵¹ Conference of January 25th 1643, Coste IX, p. 66-77.

Come... in presenting the first rule drawn up by Louise de Marillac, M. Vincent addressed the twelve Sisters gathered together: *“Providence seems to have brought the twelve of you together here with the intention of honouring His human life on earth.”* Addressing each one individually, he added: *“God has chosen me to render Him a great service. God has so willed it. ...”*⁵²

Work... M. Vincent specified: *“God said... ‘you shall labour by the sweat of your brow,’ you shall not only labour with your mind but with your hands, your arms, your entire body, and you shall work so hard that sweat will drip from your brow.... The Sister from the Charity who goes out morning and evening, carrying her soup pot in hot and cold weather, not for herself but for some poor person who can’t go to her for it and who would languish from need if she didn’t take it to him, that Sister also fulfils this commandment, dear Sisters.”*⁵³

Pray... *“Always begin all your prayers by an act of the presence of God; otherwise, an action will sometimes fail to be pleasing to Him ... faith teaches us that His holy presence is everywhere ... Take care to give an account of your prayer ... and, above all, be careful to remember the resolutions you took at meditation ... all our resolutions are nothing without grace. That’s why we really have to ask God to give us strength and set to work courageously.”*⁵⁴

For the first time, in this month of November 1633, they gathered together without a cloister, without anything that could call them religious in the strict sense of the word. For M. Vincent wanted his daughters to have, in order to be able to serve well, *“for monastery only the houses of the sick and the place where the Superioress resides; for cell, a hired room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city; for enclosure, obedience... for grille, the fear of God; for veil holy modesty”*⁵⁵. A central and crucial basis for Louise in her formation of the Sisters was established from the beginning: **the Holy Spirit must be allowed to act** in order to reach this high level of detachment, cordial charity and prompt obedience, without doing one’s own will.

Louise was particularly attentive to forming the Sisters and took the time to teach them to read, train them to serve poor persons, and instruct them in the mysteries of the faith and the practice of prayer. According to Gobillon, her first biographer, she gave the Sisters regular “public” conferences every week to encourage them in their love of their vocation and dedication to it. Although she strived to speak to them simply, she could not help but explain things to them in an emphatic and elevated manner, always with fervour that really touched their hearts. Learning to live together was an essential way to help them be open to accepting instruction. In general, they had previously only received minimal formation in the practices of spiritual life and were little accustomed to striving to practise virtue. The outcome did not always match the efforts made.

For six years, Louise was the only one concerned with all the concrete problems of life: housing, accepting the young women, studying requests, dealing with requests coming from the outside, and organising life within the community. Nevertheless, M. Vincent had not abandoned her. Their correspondence demonstrates this. The short postscripts at the end of

⁵² Conference of July 31st 1634, Coste IX, p. 1-13.

⁵³ Conference of November 28th 1649, Coste IX, p. 382.

⁵⁴ Conference of July 31st 1634, Coste IX, p. 1-13.

⁵⁵ Conference of August 24th 1659, Coste X, p. 530.

his letters justify his absences: “*Pardon me if I am so brief; I am in a great hurry.*”⁵⁶ From time to time, a little wish would escape on to the paper such as: “*Mon Dieu! how I wish your Sisters would make an effort to learn to read and that they might really know **the catechism you are teaching!***”⁵⁷ Or another “*God willing, I shall not regret what I have said to the Sisters!*”⁵⁸

At the end of long letters dealing with various matters, M. Vincent added postscripts that prove his interest in and favourable judgment on the formation of the daughters in Paris and elsewhere: “*Yesterday I saw your Sisters from the Hotel-Dieu; they are doing well. If you need my service, I shall leave everything and come; but I truly hope that you can do without it.*”⁵⁹

Credit is due to Mathurine Guerin, Louise’s former secretary, who wrote to Marguerite Chetif who had requested information about Louise’s spot-on discernment of spirits: “*When I had the happiness of writing her letters, I did not consider them beautiful teachings at the time. However, now I admire the diversity she gave to them. In some, she instills the observance of the Rule, in others fear; in all of them the pure love of God... and while I am on the subject of charity, she also used to say that she hoped that God would preserve the Company, and that it would continue to draw girls who were **very poor as well as those of moderate or wealthy circumstances**...*”⁶⁰

The older Sisters recalled this and told others: “*She would frequently say to us: do you want to strive for perfection? My very dear Sisters, **we need to strive to die to ourselves.** Oh, that I might write this in my blood and leave it for you in letters of gold.*”

After a period of formation, the Sisters received the habit according to the time scale that Mademoiselle Le Gras, our first Superioress, decided right for giving the habit to the new Sisters.

With the Councillors and the Sister responsible for the new Sisters, or with her Assistant at the time when the Seminary had not yet been established, Louise studied the progress that the newly-arrived Sisters made in the first six months after their arrival in the Motherhouse. She then spoke to M. Vincent, if he was available, and always to the Director General. Then she gave the order to make the necessary arrangements to give the Sister the habit on the day that had been decided on.

Mademoiselle would first invoke the Holy Spirit and then gave a short exhortation or instruction on the new habit that the Sisters were receiving. She also spoke about the obligations to which they were committing themselves, including fidelity to God in their vocation to serve God and poor persons, and to do this in the Company for the whole of their live

On one occasion, on the eve of the feast of Saint Andrew, Mademoiselle gave a conference on the Gospel of the day on the call of this blessed apostle and his brother Peter.

⁵⁶ Coste I, L. 160, p. 232.

⁵⁷ Coste I, L. 210, p. 305.

⁵⁸ Coste I, L. 218, p. 312.

⁵⁹ Coste I, L. 224, p. 323.

⁶⁰ *Documents* p. 952 – Documents A 1068 and 822 (quoted in part in introduction of SW, rest not available in English)

Addressing the four new Sisters about the happiness of being called to be servants of God, she added: “***you have until tomorrow to reflect and to see if your motive is the pure love of God.***” The next day, she gave the toquois to these four daughters who were receiving the habit, and spoke to them with such fervour that she seemed to be animated with the Spirit of God. She said to the first Sister: “*With your whole heart, Sister, you are renouncing the vanities of this world and adorning yourself in this simple headdress, in order to close your ears to all worldly discourses and to open them to eternal truths.*” To the second she said: “*My very dear Sister, I ask our Lord, that at the moment you put on this white headdress which for you represents purity, that any vain indulgence for the world will be driven from your heart. May it be filled with consideration of things of heaven, so that **your heart may be completely pure and your ears may be closed to the discourses of our time and open to eternal truths.***” Mademoiselle coiffed the two others after giving them the same instructions.

Several days afterwards, two other Sisters received the habit. After reminding them of some obligations this entailed, she added: “*Do you think, my dear Sisters, that this happened by chance, and that this **delay** occurred according to the plan of human creatures? Oh no, my Sisters, nothing occurs without having been specially directed by God. If we were to accept all the events that happen as coming from him, we would not commit as many faults as we do when something happens that displeases us, because we only see it as having been ordained by creatures and not as coming from the Creator. There is suffering, but have a bit of courage, my dear Sisters...*”⁶¹

This period of formation that had been glimpsed at the Light of Pentecost event was carried out in agreement between the two Founders, notwithstanding difficulties of health, recruitment, location and behaviour of those who were called. At the end of this period, Louise de Marillac asked M. Vincent’s permission to go to Chartres, for “*the good of our little Company requires it.*” When she returned she gave an account of her pilgrimage to M. Vincent: “*... On Monday, Feast of the Dedication of the Church of Chartres, I offered to God the designs of His Providence on the Company of the Daughters of Charity. I offered the said Company entirely to Him, asking Him to destroy it rather than let it be established contrary to His holy will. I asked for it, through the prayers of the Holy Virgin, Mother and Guardian of the said Company, the purity of which it stands in need... seeing the fulfillment of the vow of the Blessed Virgin in the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation, I asked Him for the grace of fidelity for the Company... that He might be the strong and loving bond that unites the hearts of all the sisters...*”⁶²

Since that day, Mary has been called the Mother of the Company.

(to be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Daughter of Charity

⁶¹ Gobillon, Volume V, 1886 and thoughts of Mademoiselle Le Gras (not available in English)

⁶² SW,L111 p.122.

SPECIAL 350TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THE FOUNDERS

Saint Louise de Marillac's experience of Church and of charitable works in the past and in our day

INTRODUCTION

This Vincentian Family Congress gives us the opportunity to reflect on Saint Louise and her role in the Church. Her contemplative approach to the mystery of the Church and its situation at that time led her to become a woman with a deep sense of Church as she followed the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. But she did more than just reflect and contemplate; she committed herself to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. She is steeped in theology, well read in the Scriptures and familiar with the teachings of the Council of Trent. She meditates on the Church in the light of the mystery of Pentecost; she knows that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit who enlightens, strengthens and leads it to perfection throughout the ages. This theme of Saint Louise's understanding of Church has been studied in depth by Father Juan Corpus Delgado in his thesis¹ of 1981.

Reflecting again on this theme today, I will be looking at three aspects of Saint Louise's relationship with the Church which, in my opinion, are the most inspirational for our own times. I am concentrating on these three aspects because they relate to issues that have relevance for today:

I have noticed that in our times some people have called into question the idea that the Church is Mother and Teacher of those who believe in Jesus Christ. On the one hand there are some baptised Christians who say, "Christ YES, the Church NO; while on the other hand many people in our society would like to stifle the voice of the Church and her teaching. I think that in these circumstances we need to deepen our knowledge of the Founders' sense of Church, particularly Saint Louise's relationship with it.

We are all aware that we live in a very individualistic society which witnesses to selfishness, competitiveness, self-advancement, violence and breakdown in family and social relationships. All this has repercussions on the life of the Church (and therefore on the different branches of our Vincentian Family), fractures unity and does not promote union within the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. This is why John Paul II, in his pastoral programme for the Third Millennium puts before us as the baseline, the spirituality of communion: "*To make the Church the home and school of communion: that is the great challenge that faces us in the millennium which is just beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and to respond to the world's deepest yearnings.*"² This call from the Church is closely linked to what Saint Louise, experienced, lived out and taught about the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

¹ DELGADO RUBIO, Corpus Juan, *Luisa de Marillac y la Iglesia*, Ed. CEME, Salamanca 1981

² JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 43

The economic globalisation of the society in which we live and the frequent recurrence of natural disasters such as the recent earthquake in Haiti, are leading to situations of extreme poverty in our world. These situations demand a response from us as members of a Church which is the servant of the poor, according to the thinking of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

In my talk I will be dealing with three points: the understanding of Church that the faithful in general had in the 17th century, Saint Louise's views on the Church, and the challenges facing the Vincentian Family in our times.

1 THE WAY THAT THE FAITHFUL UNDERSTOOD CHURCH IN THE XVII CENTURY

Before I say any more about this section I would like to refer to what we understand today by the words "a sense of Church." To my mind, this relates to the way that the baptised person thinks about the mystery of the Church, its nature, value and meaning for the Christian life and what commitments follow from being members of the Church. Saint Louise reflected on this regularly and talked about it to the Daughters of Charity and the Ladies of the Association of Charities. Her writings reveal the ecclesial nature of her faith:

- She realises that she has received the gift of faith through the Church, Mother of the believers.
- Her faith is nourished, grows and matures through the sacraments, the Church's liturgical prayer and the Word of God. She knows that faith, hope and charity preserve union within the Mystical Body.
- Faith without works is dead and so she strives through her utter commitment to works of charity, to improve life for the poor. (Cf Fr Benito Martinez³) Louise is part of the Church which also is the servant of the poor.

This being said, we have to recognise that the faithful in general in France had only a feeble understanding of Church. It is true that society in those days had a greater regard for religion, unlike our own times which are characterised by secularism, but many people then were profoundly ignorant of religious truths and would scarcely give a thought to what the mystery of the Church signified. Saint Louise developed and lived out a sense of Church that was rare in those days.

1.1. In the Church of the Catholic Counter-reformation

The Catholic **Counter-reformation** was, as we all know, the Catholic Church's response to the Protestant reformation begun by Luther. It spread through the whole of Europe, giving rise to the famous wars of religion that lasted for more than thirty years. This situation had left the Church seriously weakened. With the Council of Trent came a period of Catholic resurgence that lasted from the pontificate of Pope Pius IV in 1560 to the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648. The Council had, as its aim, to renew the Church and stop the spread of Protestant doctrines.⁴ It was in these post-Tridentine times that Saint Vincent and

³ MARTINEZ BETANZOS, Benito: *Mademoiselle Le Gras and Saint Louise de Marillac* Editorial CEME . Salamanca 1991

⁴ Cf. Rops, DANIEL, *History of the Church*, Vol. VII, *The Catholic reformation*.

Saint Louise developed their apostolate of charity and their teachings about, and experience of, the Church.

We need to bear in mind that the decrees approved by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) included dogmatic and disciplinary issues. Its teaching remained in force until the First Vatican Council. The matters dealt with by Trent were about four aspects of renewal that were doctrinal and to do with discipline rather than ecclesial; teachings about the faith, restructuring the Church, renewal in ways of administering the sacraments and reform of the clergy. The movement towards spiritual renewal which emerged after the Council of Trent, included the works of XVIth century Spanish mystics and the XVIIth century school of French spirituality that influenced the faith and spiritual experiences of Saint Louise de Marillac.

Given that the main objective of the Council of Trent was to refute the errors of Protestantism, ecclesiology was only of secondary importance.⁵ According to Rene Taveneaux,⁶ never before in the life of the Church had a Council drawn up such a complete set of doctrinal definitions and pastoral and disciplinary rules. It was stated at Trent that the Church is an organised and hierarchical society. This idea was clearly expressed and put in writing in the request for approbation and confirmation of Decrees that the Council Fathers made to the Holy Father at the final session, to ratify the canons that had been approved.⁷

The Council of Trent reaffirmed traditional teaching about the Church and clearly defined what constituted the Catholic faith.⁸ The most important conclusions of this Council that had an impact on Saint Louise's life and her understanding of the Church were these:

Faith has its origins in Sacred Scripture and the Church's **Tradition**. She read and meditated on these at home every day. Later on she would do the same with the Ladies of the Confraternities and the Daughters of Charity.

Sacred Scripture has to be **interpreted by the Church** and not freely by the individual as Luther preached and in so doing rejected the Church's magisterium. That is why Saint Louise consulted Saint Vincent about meditation books on Sacred Scripture. She always made sure that such books were approved by the Church.

If believers were to have a solid faith they needed catechesis at home, in the parishes and in the schools. She collaborated in the work of renewing catechesis by writing a very simple catechism on the truths of religion and adapted this for use with children in the Charities Schools.

Faith is necessary for salvation but there must also be **good works**; that is why she insists on the practice of works of charity. She collaborates in the smooth running of the Confraternities in the parishes of Paris and the restoration of those in country areas.

She sees **the sacrament of Baptism** as important because this is the door that gives entry into the Church and makes us children of God. She frequently meditates on the

⁵ G. ALBERIGO, *The ecclesiology of the Council of Trent*, pp. 232-233

⁶ Cf. Rene TAVENEAU, *Le Catholicisme dans la France Classique, 1610-1715*, S.E.D.E.S, Paris, 1980

⁷ *Ibidem*, prologue

⁸ Cf. ALVAREZ GOMEZ, *Jesus: Manual de Historia de la Iglesia*, Chap. XLII and XLIII, on post-Tridentine Church reform. Ed. Claretiana, Buenos Aires, 1979

importance of Baptism and writes down her meditations in order to help the Daughters of Charity.

The **consecrated bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ**. This truth is reaffirmed in opposition to Luther who said that these only represented Christ. Her meditations and teachings on the Eucharist show clearly how deeply she had allied herself to the Church's faith in this sacrament.

We have to **pay homage to the Blessed Virgin** and the saints because these are examples and witnesses of the Christian life. Saint Louise knows this. She has such a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin that in her spiritual testament that she left before her death she declares that Mary is our only Mother. With regard to the saints, we see in her writings and her teaching many exhortations to look on them as role models for the Christian life and intercessors.⁹

Louise de Marillac is clearly a saint with a deep sense of Church. She was a Christian who welcomed and benefited from the fruits of the spiritual and ecclesial renewal that came to the Church after the Council of Trent.

1.2. The Dominican understanding of Church

Louise lived with the Dominican nuns at Poissy until she was thirteen and these years had a profound influence on her Christian life. I believe that her strong sense of Church comes from this early part of her life as Father Corpus Delgado has indicated in his book "*Louise de Marillac and the Church*."¹⁰

No research has been carried out into the way that the Dominican Sisters of Poissy understood and experienced Church but we know that St Dominic was imbued with a sense of the Church's greatness.¹¹ That is why he founded the order of Friars Preachers which played an important part in the Church. The historian J. Alvarez Gomez declared that before St Dominic founded this Order as well as that of the Dominican nuns, he made two important discoveries:

he became very much aware of the effects of the Cathar and Albigensian heresies on the universal Church and

was aware, too, of the apostolic life which made him identify with the Holy See's deep concern about holiness in the Church and its apostolic character.

With great courage and prudence he made the Papal envoys, who preached to the Cathars urging them to conversion, see that they should present their message to the heretics by personally witnessing to a life of poverty and simplicity without any ostentation.¹² St Dominic worked very hard to give his religious family a deep sense of the Church based on knowledge of faith, the sacraments and solid doctrine taken from the Catechism of the Church. In this way the Dominicans would be able to confront heresies and the heretics' masterly preaching against the Church's hierarchy and the sacraments. Such was the

⁹ Cf. JEDIN H. *Historia del Concilio de Trento*, Vol. IV. E Pamplona 1972

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¹² ALVAREZ GOMEZ, Jesus, *Historia de la vida religiosa*, 3 vols. Ed Claretiana, Madrid 1998; Vol II, pp. 338-339

Dominican heritage that pervaded the convent of Poissy and which Louise learned and assimilated while she was educated there.

1.3. How the great spiritual movements in XVIIth century France viewed the Church

In France the XVIIth century was known as the “great spiritual century” rather like the XVIth century was in Spain. That era produced great saints; St Ignatius of Loyola, St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross were the greatest examples of Spanish spirituality in those days. In France, the XVIIth century was the century of Pierre de Berulle, St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul. J.J. Olier, St John Eudes....St Louise de Marillac, Jeanne-Francoise Freymot de Chantal. In XVIIth century France the Church experienced a remarkable renewal. At that time, “*Christian Italy which had provided so many troops for the Catholic Reformation movement was now in a state of inertia. Germany had not yet emerged from the fierce contests between Catholics and Protestants. In England, the “papist Church” was too preoccupied to fight against heresy and schism, to do anything else but lead confused campaigns. According to Daniel Rops, “Spain, whose extravagant and indolent monarchs were more concerned about safeguarding their thrones than defending their religion, no longer had an Ignatius, a Teresa, or a John of the Cross; it only had theologians.”*¹³

However, the great spiritual movements in Italy and Spain did contribute to the greatness of French spirituality. Societies of Apostolic Life, which took such deep root in French soil, came from Italy. Spain gave the world a twofold spiritual movement comprising, on the one hand, the “*Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola, which is the more ascetic aspect, and “*The Interior Castle*” of Saint Teresa of Avila which represents the mystical side. Bremond regarded this Spanish spirituality in France as a “mystical invasion”. Lanson went so far as to write, “*Spain is inundating us with its devotion. But it isn’t a mystical invasion that has colonised French spirituality because the spiritual forces of our land can, in some way, modify the influence of spiritual movements coming from outside.*¹⁴

The spirituality of Frances’ great century, then, presents a series of features that are quite different from its origins:

It showed variety and originality: the result of spiritual figures in the home country having an influence on spiritual forces from abroad. In France, these spiritual forces among whom were Vincent and Louise, succeeded in changing the face of the Church.

The devout humanism of St Francis de Sales gave rise to a genuine Christian movement centred on Jesus Christ, founder and head of the Church.¹⁵

Asceticism recommended by the Council of Trent to conquer the inherent human inclination towards evil, now stresses the possibility of doing good when acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the only source of mystical experience, as we see in the life of Louise de Marillac.¹⁶

¹³ Daniel Rops, “*L’Eglise des temps classiques*” p. 64

¹⁴ ALVAREZ GOMEZ, Jesus: *Historia de la vida religiosa*, o.c. pp 358-359

¹⁵ EYMARD D’ANGERS (J) *L’humanisme chretien au XVII siècle*, La Haye, M.Nijhoff 1970. H. BREMOND *Histoire litteraire du sentiment religieux, III, la conquete mystique; ecole francaise*. Paris 1921

¹⁶ Jean CALVET. *Louise de Marillac* AUBIER 1958 P. 157-217

In his book "Louise de Marillac," Calvet declares, "I wanted to point out her originality and to bring out her personal greatness. She is one of the purest glories of French womanhood."¹⁷

2 VINCENT DE PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF "CHURCH" AND HOW HE SHARED THIS WITH LOUISE DE MARILLAC

When Louise de Marillac took Vincent de Paul as her Spiritual Director, he was already a man of the Church, an apostolic person. He spent all his time organising the Mission and the Charities. From 1617 onward, he had founded 20 Confraternities of Charity in the villages and on the estates of the de Gondi family, and he was on the point of founding the Congregation of the Mission. At that time Louise was 34 years old. She was a widow and her life had already been marked by suffering. From the year 1625 onwards, Louise was really and truly under the direction of Saint Vincent. He welcomed her in a respectful and friendly way but did not force his ideas on her. He guided her and helped her to discover God's will for her. They both followed Providence step by step.

Saint Vincent had at heart the wellbeing of the poor¹⁸ and he was dedicating himself completely to this task while Louise de Marillac was more moved by the desire for personal holiness. He helped her to discover and see the Church as the servant of the poor.

Vincent was able to convince Louise that the Church and every Christian have the responsibility to continue Christ's mission as servant of the poor. "To do what the Son of Man did when He was on earth": that was to be the sole aim of the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. With gentleness and patience, virtues he had learnt from Jesus Christ and from Saint Francis de Sales, he led her to see that "God is love and he wishes people to go to him through love".¹⁹ This is his first instruction. As the years passed, Louise began to absorb her director's understanding of Church. So, little by little, Louise became filled with love for the poor who for her represented the humiliated Christ and she served them with passion and great devotedness. Her interior life and the strength of the Holy Spirit that sustained her, are the source that nourished and gave life to her mission of charity in the Church.²⁰

2. LOUISE DE MARILLAC'S SENSE OF CHURCH

The perception of Church with which she was imbued from her childhood and early years was deeply etched on her mind. We see this in her Rule of Life for living in the world which she drew up under the spiritual direction of Saint Vincent at the beginning of her widowhood. When we read this we find a very pious woman who is anxious to foster her spiritual life and at the same time take part in the apostolic mission of the Church: "I shall try never to be idle; therefore....I shall work cheerfully, either for the Church or for the poor or for my household."²¹ This commitment tells us that the Church occupies an important place in her life and that she feels it a duty to devote time and effort to it. With this sense of Church comes the need to work for those who are poor. Here we note the influence of

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.9

¹⁸ MARTINEZ BETANZOS, Benito: *Mademoiselle le Gras and Saint Louise de Marillac*. Ed. CEME, Salamanca 1991, p. 21

¹⁹ COSTE I, p.86

²⁰ MARTINEZ BETANZOS, Benito: *Mademoiselle le Gras*....op. cit. p.22

²¹ *Spiritual Writings*, p.689

Vincent de Paul. Her understanding of Church is manifested most specially in work for the poor. From 1625 onward, this sense of Church grows stronger.

At the end of her Rule of Life, we find another important reference to the Church: *“I shall fast on all Fridays of the year; during Advent and Lent; on the vigils of the feasts of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles, and on all the fast days prescribed by the Church. On days when there is no fasting, I shall only take two meals unless necessity or condescension obliges me to do otherwise. 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, to honour the grace which God bestowed on his Church by giving it His Holy Spirit and by commissioning the 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. The other days of retreat would be in Advent.”*²²

Louise de Marillac never wrote a treatise on the Church but her spiritual experience, her faith, her teachings and her apostolate are deeply impregnated with her understanding of the Church.

The Church is the “Mother of believers”

During her retreat in 1657, her contemplative eyes see the Church as the Mother of believers. Louise recalls the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: the Father gives his Holy Spirit to the Church in general and to each individual soul. He makes the Church the Mother of believers by making *her the guardian of the truths that the Word Incarnate had taught her during his mortal life. The Holy Spirit transforms the heart of each believer “by making them holy through the merits of the Word Incarnate”*²³

Louise was a woman given to reflection, she was deeply spiritual and she had a well-ordered mind and that is why when she prayed about the Church as Mother of Believers, she thought about specific commitments which would lead her to be and to really feel that she had a duty to continue Christ’s mission in his Church, *“I believe that this is what Our Lord wished to convey to the Apostles when He told them that, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, they would also bear witness to Him. This is what all Christians must do, not by bearing witness to the teaching of Christ, which is the prerogative of apostolic men, but by the perfect actions of true Christians. Blessed are those persons who, under the guidance of Divine Providence, are called upon to continue the ordinary practices of the Son of God through the exercise of charity.”*²⁴

Witnessing to Jesus Christ, continuing his mission through the exercise of charity, living and dying in the faith of Jesus Christ, living and acting as a child of the Church, these were the ways in which she expressed her way of being a daughter of the Church. Louise de Marillac did not write down her resolutions as the fruit of sentimental fervour but with the determination to commit her life to bringing a bit of “heaven” to poor people. She wanted to carry out these resolutions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they might produce specific results. Like her spiritual director, Vincent de Paul, she could say, *“Such is my experience.”*²⁵

²² *Spiritual Writings*, p. 691, A 26

²³ *Spiritual Writings*, p.820, A 26

²⁴ *Spiritual Writings*, p.821, A 26

²⁵ Coste II, p. 282, Letter to Monsieur Codoing, 5th August, 1642

Her experience of being faithful to the Church is shown by the way she reads and meditates on Sacred Scripture and celebrates the liturgy, especially the way she attends Mass, and the way she prays and faithfully observes the teachings of the Church with respect, attention and true devotion. Her sense of Church doesn't stop at the personal level. When she visits the Charities she is in turn catechist, teacher and the one who trains teachers for the parish schools. She also trains groups of Ladies and teaches them the basic elements of faith and the spiritual life. She accompanies and guides them, advises them and teaches them how to practise charity towards the poor. These Ladies become catechists.

As Foundress, she cultivates a sense of Church²⁶ in the lay women and Sisters by her counsel and her spiritual accompaniment. It is also very evident in her correspondence. She directs spiritual retreats and gives constant witness to her faith in her teaching, her visits to the Charities, her meetings with the Ladies of Charity, in her talks and in her letters. She told us, the Daughters of Charity, that we must be in a twofold way daughters of the Church, firstly as Christians and then as Daughters of Charity. She was convinced that the Company was a new element in the life of the Church, something that arose from the charity of the Church. It was the Holy Spirit who raised up in the Church this Society of Apostolic Life so that the poor could come to know God's love for them and so that the charity of the Church might be seen. That is why she said, "*We have the double happiness of being Daughters of the Holy Church and, being admitted in this manner, will this not be a new obligation for us to live and to act as children of such a Mother.*"²⁷

This way of seeing and thinking about the Church led her to write her little catechism for use by the Daughters of Charity and the lay teachers in parish schools. She taught us that in order to live and act as daughters of the Church we have to respect the authority of its representatives: the Pope, the Bishops and the pastor in each parish. These people have to understand the specific vocation of the Daughters of Charity and need to have explained to them the Company's identity and objective in the Church. But in any matters of conflict with these authorities in situations that were not very much in keeping with the spirit of the gospel, she accepted that the Sisters should present their objections and difficulties to the pastor and obey him to the letter. This is what happened with the parish priest of Chars and the Bishop of Nantes.²⁸

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ

In the first edition of his book, "*The Church, a community always on pilgrimage*"²⁹(1991), Cardinal Ratzinger writes at length about the evolution of this concept of the Church. In his study and reflection he takes as his starting point Paul's statement in the letter to the Romans (Rm 12, 3-6), and it is from this source that Saint Louise took her idea of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a way of expressing the experience of unity and communion in the early Church; "*see how they love one another.*" Paul often reflected on union within the infant Church at Corinth. There were rivalries there, leaders who confronted each other, conflicts and divisions. Some declared themselves disciples of Paul while others said they were followers of Apollos; they boasted about this and sowed a spirit of rivalry

²⁶ Cf INFANTE BARBARA, Sor M. Angeles; *Vincentian Studies Week, Barcelona, 2009*. Conference: *Louise de Marillac, formator of lay people.*" CEME publications.

²⁷ *Spiritual Writings*, p.203, L179

²⁸ "*Louise de Marillac, a path of sanctity*" Sr Elisabeth Charpy. P. 105-110

²⁹ Joseph RATZINGER, "*The Church, a community always on pilgrimage*" Bayard 2009

about the charisms they had been given. Then Paul reminded them of this image of the Body of Christ by applying it to that community: (cf. 1 Co 12,16).

The Company of the Daughters of Charity also experienced trials, crises, petty rivalries and conflicts which threatened to destroy fraternal union. She reflected on this, begged the Holy Spirit to enlighten her and she wrote: *“Through the coming of the Spirit of Consolation whom the Father would send....you infused into this Mystical Body the union of your works, giving her the power to perform miracles(you) operated in them holiness of life by the merits of the Word incarnate and the Holy Spirit.”*³⁰ Louise stated very clearly that the Company of the Daughters of Charity is part of the Mystical Body which is the Church and that the Holy Spirit is at work in the Company bringing about union among its members and holiness in their lives while at the same time giving them strength to be courageous witnesses to Jesus Christ and to work for the poor without any self interest because the poor are the favoured members of Christ’s Body.

All Louise’s work highlights the role of the poor in the Church. God looks on them as members of His Body. Louise was deeply convinced of this and that is why, with Saint Vincent’s help, she worked tirelessly to form the Ladies and the young women of the confraternities of Charity founded by Saint Vincent. *“We must respect and honour everyone; the poor because they are the members of Jesus Christ and our masters; the rich so that they will provide us with the means to do good for the poor.”*³¹

This conviction brought with it a very clear commitment: she would let herself be led and guided by the Holy Spirit in order to witness to Jesus Christ, and this commitment would be less concerned with doctrine than with how she acted and with works of charity.³² This commitment was so strong that it made her emphasise the role of women in the Mystical Body which is the Church. *“It is very evident, in this century, that Divine Providence willed to make use of women to show that it was His goodness alone which desired to aid afflicted peoples and to bring them powerful help for their salvation.”*³³

This note refers to the Ladies of Charity whose works and concerns Louise shared all through her life. But it is also valid for the Daughters of Charity. The activities of the Charities and of the Daughters of Charity show that Louise had confidence in women. Louise de Marillac, together with Vincent de Paul, brought together men, women, priests, Sisters and lay people in order to serve and evangelise the poor, the favoured members of Jesus Christ. The immensity of the task to be accomplished caused all the forces of the Church to work together and genuinely collaborate to achieve concrete results. At difficult times when Louise found the Sisters apathetic and lacking in enthusiasm, she would remind them that this was weakening Christ’s Mystical Body and that its special members, the poor, were suffering as a result. *“Where are the gentleness and charity that you must preserve so carefully when dealing with our dear masters, the sick poor...? If we deviate in the slightest from the conviction that they are the members of Jesus Christ, it will infallibly lead to the weakening of these beautiful virtues in us.”*³⁴

³⁰ *Spiritual Writings*, Charpy, A 26, p820

³¹ *Spiritual Writings*, p. 469

³² *Spiritual Writings*, A 26

³³ *Spiritual Writings*, A56 p.789

³⁴ *Spiritual Writings*, L 104b p. 113

These convictions with regard to the Church, Christ's Mystical Body, appear on the wide screen of her life that projects her experience. Louise was convinced that the Church cannot exist without the Holy Spirit. She wanted each Daughter of Charity and each member of the Association of Charities to conduct themselves as children of the Church. That is why she asks everyone to be loyal to the Church's teaching. However, if a pastor or a bishop presumed to suggest or order something with regard to the poor that was not in conformity with the gospel, she courageously showed her disapproval. We have an example of this in the way she acted towards the pastor at Chars who was totally influenced by Jansenism.³⁵ Si

Her unconditional adherence to the Church, is shown in her respect and veneration for the Pope, Christ's representative and head of the Church. We see this in a letter she wrote to Fr. Antoine Portail in Rome; *"I, personally, have felt consolation in knowing that you are at the source of the holy Church and near its head, the Holy Father of all Christians. I have so often wished to be there in order to receive, as a child- though an unworthy one- his holy blessing."*³⁶ Before her death she did all in her power to have the Company of the Daughters of Charity approved by the Church. However, that didn't happen until about 8 years after her death.³⁷ At the celebration to mark the 300th anniversary of her death, Pope John XXIII acknowledged Saint Louise's unconditional loyalty to the Church and her devoted service to Charity, by proclaiming her the patron of all Associations of Charity and of social work in the Church of God.³⁸

The Church, the servant of the poor

From the earliest days of Christianity, the Church has been the servant of the poor and showed herself to be this. This characteristic of the Church was widely recognised in the first four centuries. The teachings of the Church Fathers strongly emphasised this and we see it particularly in the text of the homily given by St Basil of Cesarea, in the times of famine. After the fourth century this aspect of the Church became less important and this continued until modern times. Saint Vincent de Paul is one of the men of the Church who contributed by his faith and his actions, to restoring completely the importance that should be given to this aim of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI speaks about this in article 28 of the Encyclical *"Deus caritas est"*.

In her meditation, Louise is convinced that working for the human and spiritual promotion of poor people is a way of putting the gospel into practice and witnessing to the risen Christ. The works she founded are witness to her convictions: the Charity Schools, the service of the sick in their own homes, care of the sick in hospitals, care and organisation of the foundlings work, serving the galley slaves, looking after the mentally ill and the elderly people in the Holy Name Refuge, the formation of the Ladies and the Daughters of Charity, etc. She often insisted that the Sisters must remember that they are servants *"The Daughters of Charity must recall and possess the qualities of servants of the poor in order to remain faithful to their duty."*³⁹

³⁵ *Un chemin de saintete: Louise de Marillac*, Sr. E. Charpy p.105-110

³⁶ *Spiritual Writings*, L179 and similarly in L389 to Monsieur Berthe

³⁷ *Genese de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charite*, p. 25-27

³⁸ Marie Dominique POINSENET, *"De l'angoisse a la saintete"* p. 287-290

³⁹ *Spiritual Writings*, L 419, p. 457

Jean Calvet called her the saint of the Holy Spirit and says that she let herself be guided by Him as the first Christians did. This contributed to the growth and expansion of the Church as servant of the poor. I really think that the biography written by Fr Benito Martinez; *“A paradise for the poor at all costs”*, contains the best account of her ecclesial experience for it presents Louise as a member of the Church, servant of the poor. Towards the end of her life, when Louise was reflecting on her work in the Church, she wrote: *“Some people might object that one of the principal reasons for founding the Confraternity and the Company of the Daughters of Charity is the spiritual service of the poor; they are all persuaded of this truth, glory be to God for it....then she goes on to give a brief list of the works and the good done by the sisters and she adds “All this was done under a veil of silence.....since this manner of acting is in keeping with the first commandments of the Founder of the Company, Jesus Christ, speaking through his servant.”*⁴⁰ Just as the Church founded by Jesus Christ is servant of the poor, so, too, are members of the Confraternities and the Company.

3.THE CHALLENGES FACING THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY TODAY

Louise de Marillac’s experience of Church can help us to respond to the challenges that come from contemporary society. Her most profound reflections on the Church date from her spiritual retreat in 1657, that is to say, three years before her death.

1. To respond to the increasing secularism of our society, Louise teaches members of the Vincentian Family to consolidate their faith, to engage in formation and to offer a courageous and visible witness. In days gone by, there was much religious ignorance and the same is true today. Moral relativism is spreading everywhere. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise knew baptised people who denied their faith and gave up their religion.... we have the same experience. Louise teaches us to train to be catechists and to train others to be catechists. This is one of the challenges facing us. As members of the Vincentian Family we have an urgent task to perform in the Church: to catechise and work for the formation of children and young people, as well as to adults and the elderly. In this way we will be helping the Church to continue to be Mother and Teacher. As Vincentians we are also called to strongly and courageously defend the Church as Louise did in her dealings with the pastor of Chars and the Duchess de Liancourt who were influenced by Jansenism.

2 To respond to the challenge of individualism in our society Louise asks us to work for union between all the members of the Vincentian Family so that we can share in the task of building up the Church, Christ’s Mystical Body.

After the Second Vatican Council the Ladies of Charity changed their name. They called their Association, the International Association of Charities and took for their motto, *“Working together against poverty.”* This is a call that requires a permanent response. As John Paul II reminded us in his pastoral programme for the third millennium, we are called to live out together a spirituality of communion.(Cf Jn 17, 21)

The Vincentian Family is called on to seek out and tackle the causes of poverty. to work for respect for life, to carry out formation programmes in the charism, to pray to the Holy Spirit as Saint Louise did, and to organise and carry out aid projects for the poorest of the poor.

3.To respond to the challenge of the economic crisis and the catastrophes in Haiti, in Chile and in other countries, Louise calls on us to be on the side of the poor.

⁴⁰ *Spiritual Writings*, p.833. A100

. She organised networks of evangelical charity that continue to operate across the world. At the end of her life she was happy to see the help and services offered to poor people and to see children being taught the faith. But what gave her most joy was to see that many people had found their faith and felt saved by God through the missions preached by the Missioners and thanks to the charity of the Ladies of the Confraternities and the services rendered by the Sisters.

Our world continues to produce new forms of poverty. There are many people who don't read the Gospel and hardly ever go to Church but they believe in this God who touches hearts to serve those who are poor. (We were able to see this after the earthquake in Haiti.) With Saint Louise de Marillac I pray to God that this Congress may be a springboard which moves the Vincentian Family in Spain to organise itself better, to unite its forces so that we may come to be, authentic servants of all poor people. The Church is and always will be the servant of the poor. We Vincentians have to respond more radically and with greater solidarity.

- To cultivate the effectiveness of the charism through our prayers, in order to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ the servant and evangeliser of the poor, and to continue his mission.
- To work together in meeting the needs of the poor.
- To enrol other people in creative projects for the service of poor people.
- To be part of a network that works for systemic change.
- Be convinced of our need for ongoing formation in order to be faithful to the charism, and to acquire the necessary qualifications for being good servants of the poor.
- Cultivate union in our relationships with the members of the different branches and the different Communities, making each group and each community a House and a School of communion.

Sister Maria Angeles INFANTE
Daughter of Charity

Cover 3
Being a Servant

Servanthood is not a job we do, it is a gift.
Being a servant, after the example of Jesus,
means offering oneself in love.
A servant does not put herself first...
She is not the light...
She is the hand that holds the flame high,
A servant does not speak in order to command... but to help.
Her role is to promote well-being,
to diminish suffering,
to create those conditions that are favourable
for bringing happiness.
She prepares the ground
and sings a melody that she herself has not invented.
Her time is no longer her own.

One is not appointed a servant,
one is called and invited
and one chooses to become a servant
in response to this call.

It is very risky to be a servant
for all that remains is one's gift of self.

Lord, you call us to be servants,
to be Gospel...

Help us respond as you do,
make of us "servants of love".