

MOTHER MARIE EUGENIE and the ASSUMPTION WAY in EDUCATION

The Educational theory of the Assumption is directly related to the experience of Mother Marie Eugenie: her home upbringing and her discovery of the Catholic faith. In her home, Eugénie Milleret received a rather exceptional intellectual and moral formation, through formal and informal instruction. Later, her religious conversion had a strong intellectual component and the ideas of teachers like Lamennais helped her to form a coherent philosophy of education. Lastly, the experience of Marie Eugénie and the first communities of the Assumption arrived at what we can call "the Assumption Way" which is found and easily recognized in all Assumption educational endeavors, no matter how varied in kind and cultural insertion.

I have chosen to follow a narrative and biographical approach as the most reliable in sharing with you the philosophy and pedagogy of Mother Marie Eugénie, since I believe it will give you the best grasp of the essentials and permit you more easily to transpose those essentials into your own educational context.

In point of fact, Mother Marie Eugénie did not really take the time to develop her thought in writing. We draw her teaching from a great many documents but only two are systematic treatments of Assumption education. One is the *Counsels on Education* written by Marie Eugénie for her little group of sisters at the very beginning of the Congregation. (This document sounds like the first in a series of instructions – which is not followed up with others – and concerns mainly the moral formation of the students and the sisters' contact with them as religious.) The other is a report made up for a government inspection in 1848¹ (after seven years of experience), which gives a fair idea of the Assumption school, its objectives, curriculum and activities. There are also a few *Instructions* of Marie Eugénie which treat our style of education and give insight into the spiritual and theological foundations of the Assumption aims and philosophy. A few contain also some pedagogical elements. Early brochures give an idea of the discourse employed with prospective parents.

It was in various letters for different occasions that Marie Eugénie presented what seems to me her most important insights into Assumption education: the vision, the philosophy and passion that animated her. The letters, usually written in response to some challenge or difficulty, give the impression that the ideas are very clear to the Foundess, but they often come across to me as intuitions and ideas that I have had to struggle with when I wanted to explain them to my contemporaries. Perhaps Marie Eugénie was also struggling to express herself. She was a woman of action more than of words.

One of the difficulties - and one of the graces of Marie Eugénie - is the yoking of a great spiritual vision or end, with the practical means of achieving it. There is a kind of hiatus between this world and the next which escapes our concepts and words. (Like the already-present and yet-to-come of the Kingdom.)

In any case, when we put all the pieces together we have a full, rich and complete philosophy of education for the Assumption today.

The CHILD and FOUNDATIONS: CHARACTER FORMATION

Although Marie Eugénie suffered the discord between her parents and their final separation, the death of siblings and the loss of her father's fortune, she considered her childhood a happy one.² This was largely due to the extraordinary influence of her mother whom, she tells

¹ "Un projet éducatif au 19^e siècle," *Etudes d'Archives*, Vol. 5, p. 54.

² Letter to Father Combalot, 14 July 1837.

us, she did not just love, but adored.³ This was undoubtedly due to the charm and force of her mother's personality, but the frequent and prolonged absences of her father, along with his lack of tenderness, are to be taken into consideration too.

Her mother was not particularly affectionate with the young Eugénie⁴, but she apparently took great interest in her only daughter's education. Indeed, this was probably the chief attention that Eugénie received and her mother's way of showing her affection. It would seem also that no effort was lost on the young Eugénie. Her mother died when she was only fifteen but Marie Eugénie constantly cites her mother's words of wisdom and refers back to the education she received from her mother as exemplary. In fact, she mentions no other tutor or household member in connection with her upbringing.

Eugénie does not say anything about the influence of her father, but we surmise that ideas were important in the Milleret family and know that she was instructed, as well as influenced, by the conversations of her parents and their guests.⁵ Her father was deeply involved in politics and from him, perhaps, she inherited what she labeled a "passion" for social and political questions. Her father's profession, however, was banking and perhaps from his side, Marie Eugénie acquired the facility with finances that was so useful to her —and to Father d'Alzon—all through the years of their opening houses, building and running convents and institutions.

We do have to conclude, moreover, that Marie Eugénie was, herself, an exceptionally gifted child: intelligent and thoughtful, sensitive and self-motivated, high in both intuition and analytic capability. Her early correspondence reveals a strong sense of herself: that she was well-born, intelligent and good-looking;⁶ a strong sense of nobility and honor, of the traits that ennobled, like integrity, straightforwardness, goodness, courage and generosity, and an equally strong sense of the things that debased. Although she may have been aware of it only later, the child Eugénie saw plenty of vice both in her entourage as well as in her own family and lets us understand that it consisted in sexual immorality⁷ and excess, vanity and superficiality. Looking back over her youth, she expresses in several letters and spiritual notes, the belief that God, himself, had protected her in a special way from falling into such a style of life and sin.

Surely, her mother also played a major role in protecting her daughter. I suggest that she kept her daughter busy and trained her to take interest in many things. Then we can assume that she introduced Eugénie to the best of her French and European culture⁸: literature, poetry, art the intellectual heritage; and above all, an understanding of what made a good and worthy person —the positive development of character through virtue. Later on, Marie Eugénie will refer to the natural virtues as the fundamental and necessary basis of a spiritual and Christian life.

³ *Notes Intimes*, N.178/01 (1841).p

⁴ The only photograph we have of Madame Eugénie Milleret is horribly severe and Marie Eugénie tells us that her mother considered caresses and such signs of affection as too soft and debilitating. Letter to Father Combalot, L.3, 14 Juillet 1837.

⁵ The ideas of her mother and of two men [unidentified] had deeply influenced Marie Eugénie. "These two minds seem to have been eminent, as well as that of my mother; both were ardent democrats, not for the vain details of daily politics, which could never seriously interest me, but for the future, the destiny, the moral nobility of our country." L.1610 to d'Alzon. See also note 31 below. "

⁶ *Notes Intimes*, N.162/01 (1839).

⁷ *Notes Intimes*, N.185/03 (1842), N.208, Retreat notes of 1850.

⁸ She was fluent in German.

We find constant references to duty and a kind of conviction, instilled by her mother, that each person has grace, or what is necessary, to fulfill one's duty.⁹ Eugénie grew up feeling responsible, not only for herself, but also for others, for society. This was the age of poets who took up the cause of the poor, of novelists like Georges Sand and Victor Hugo and of a series of social philosophers and "activists." Marie Eugénie knew them and we know also that the "social question" was a familiar subject in the Milleret family. But concern for the poor was not just a matter of theory; Eugénie's mother took responsibility for the simple farmers and workers in the environs.

A word that Marie Eugénie uses often to describe her mother is "energetic." She tells us that her education was "strong" (*forte*), solid.¹⁰ It is obvious that her mother wanted her to be a strong woman, to be able to act, to run a house, care for others, and to bear up under stress and difficult situations. She not only recalled occasions when her mother trained her to be strong, but also saw her mother give the example.¹¹ By osmosis, without questioning, she learned to take things on herself, to spare others, to be aware of the people around her, to be attentive to needs and to make things easier for others. One of her childhood friends, a cousin, recounts several instances of Eugénie's strength of character and adult sense of kindness.¹² In a letter to Father D'Alzon about education, Mother Marie Eugénie tells how her mother had taught that one of a woman's roles is to smooth relationships as one does by putting cotton between crystals to keep them from breaking.¹³

Despite the care and concern, and even the severity, that went into Eugénie's education, she enjoyed a high degree of liberty. This attitude on the part of her mother went along with the sense of responsibility and duty inculcated in her at a young age. Eugénie, moreover, revered her mother's authority and obviously obeyed more out of the desire to please her rather than out of fear. For this reason alone, authority does not seem to have been invoked often. Probably never in cases of ideas and beliefs.¹⁴

We don't know if Madame Milleret had read any books on education, but J.J.Rousseau surely lurked somewhere in the background and liberty was certainly at the heart of her parents' Republican creed. I believe that Madame Milleret's respect for her daughter and the liberty she gave her offset her sternness and heavy demands.

In these few paragraphs about the youth of Marie Eugénie, I believe that we find the source of the Assumption stress on Character formation and the seeds of the its salient points.

Mention has been made above of various elements of Eugénie's early intellectual formation. Due to a bout with scarlet fever and her fragile health, she spent only a short time in school. But she profited well of that experience and, despite all the negativity she will show later concerning existing schools, she will have only praise for her teachers at the boarding school in Metz. The insistence on reading, writing and speaking one's own language, correctly, simply and clearly may have come from her time at school as she would later tell about the compositions she wrote and the excellent lessons she received in analyzing texts. (The selected texts, moreover, and the topics for composition were educative also because of their moral con-

⁹ Letter to Father Gros, L.1504 (1841), Letter to Emmanuel d'Alzon 19 Juillet 1843, Introduction to the *Conseils sur l'Education*, 1842.

¹⁰ To Father Combalot, 3 January 1839: "education that my mother made energetic [*forte*] if not Christian."

¹¹ Madame Milleret, herself, had been orphaned at fourteen and her mother had died when she was only ten.

¹² Testimony of Ernestine Pruneau. Archives of the Assumption, Auteuil.

¹³ L. 19 July, 18432

¹⁴ Eugénie's attitude towards her father's authority was quite another story. The experience with her parents is complex and this, coupled with her independent nature, made her personally somewhat ambivalent about authority, to say the least. But her personal struggles in this area, did not affect her educational theory. (See *Notes Intimes*, p.)

tent¹⁵). Her math teacher also receives praise¹⁶ and Marie Eugénie attributes her facility in math to his lessons.

Though her formal education was of short duration, subsequent events would show that she developed a great capacity as an autodidact.

As for the fine arts, we are told in an "Instruction"¹⁷, of drawing lessons and, although she considers that for young women, far too much time is given to instruction in piano and music, it is logical to assume for the same reason that she received some training in that field. A recurrent theme, coming either from her education or from her own natural bent, will be later how studies for women should be useful.¹⁸ We can suppose that this is one more conviction inherited from her mother who did not approve of too much time's being given to subjects that just stimulated the imagination.¹⁹ And Marie Eugénie says of herself that she has no interest in metaphysics, but only in those ideas which have practical consequences.²⁰

We can conclude that Anne Eugénie Milleret was brought up in the very best of the European tradition. Her mother provided what could be considered the ideal education of the nobility, a humanist formation for the "Compleet" woman. (Comparable to the ideal of nineteenth century education in England for men in the best public schools.)

Had she not become Mother Marie Eugénie, we might have found her the mistress of a salon. Who knows? She might even have founded a school, though I doubt it.

In any case, the story follows...

To sum up:

The young Eugénie had learned to read and write in her own language. She appreciated these courses both for the facility they gave her in expressing herself and for the reflection provoked by assignments.

She had learned good style and pleasure in literature from the analysis of texts.

Although she may have read novels of little value, she was fed on high ideals and knew the attraction of goodness, beauty and truth. I doubt that this just happened, but tend to think that her mother protected her from baser pleasures, more by presenting her with the better things of life than by forbidding her them. A true noblesse.

She was brought up not only to know and esteem the best virtues of her culture but also to practice them.

The style of life in her home, and probably her own inborn bent, formed her to a practical sense, to doing and most likely to being busy.

The social ideals that were discussed in the family salon not only inspired noble desires to serve but likewise found concrete expression in service of the poor.

Marie Eugénie appreciated her education and, although she conceded that it had been "half-pagan"²¹, she also considered that it had been a serious and solid education, "more Christian than many that bear the name."²²

Rare was the child of that milieu who went without any religious education. At age twelve, Eugénie made an extraordinary First Holy Communion. She says that it was without the "usual" preparation, but she had learned some catechism. When we put all the pieces together, I think it is clear that her mother - even if she was not a believer - out of conviction or re-

¹⁵ *Les Origines*, Vol. I, Ed. 1898, pp. 39-40

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 38-39.

¹⁷ 10 March 1878, *Instructions*.

¹⁸ L1556 to Father d'Alzon. "We have found that, ordinarily, the instruction women acquire is totally superficial, and thus, without any real use." ... They are "ashamed to do the least useful thing."

¹⁹ *Instruction*, 28 April 1889, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Foundation.

²⁰ Letter to Father d'Alzon, 27 February.1844.

²¹ L.10 to Father Combalot 14 November 1837.

²² Letter 1501 to Lacordaire, 13 December 1841. *Textes Fondateurs*.

sponsibility to edify those around her - had her children baptized and attended Mass. God was a reality for Marie Eugénie and she prayed. Any instruction she received, however, was not meaningful so that religion, Catholicism, had little relation to her life and the things that she valued. She will later say that Christ had no place in her education and that her studies, on account of their breadth, had raised invincible obstacles to the faith.²³

THE IN-BETWEEN YEARS: The ADOLESCENT and KNOWING the [her] WORLD

It would be rushing ahead of the story if I were to go immediately to Eugénie's encounter with Christ and conversion to the Church. The world she had lived in with her mother came to an end abruptly when her parents separated, she accompanied her mother to Paris and her mother died of cholera within a few hours. Eugénie was just fifteen, only an adolescent, too old for any school we can imagine and too young for marriage. Her childhood has come to an end. During the next five or six years, she will experience a young woman's life, the life of the rich and well-born in the 19th century.

So what did a young Frenchwoman of her position do during the fourteen waking hours of a day? There are meals, to be sure, and in a large family of interesting people or a family that entertains, one could hope for good conversation. A certain amount of time can be spent with one's toilette. [I can remember how boring it was in boarding school when the girls spent hours doing their hair or nails and makeup.] Then one can read if there is a good supply of books, play the piano, embroider and go visiting friends or receive them. A couple of letters from this period in her life, lead us to believe that this was the lifestyle of the two families which welcomed her. One of them, however, was pious, so we can add a few hours for Church and devotions.

What both had in common was not just the occupations of the day, but the preoccupations. M. Nettement, in his delightful book on the education of young French ladies, *De la seconde éducation des filles*²⁴, tells us what Eugénie will also tell:

"Empty the conversations that turn on marriages and births, the family tree of this one, the dowry of that one, inheritances...Hopes for a fortune about to come, when a word of regret would be more à propos in mouths speaking of such things. The death of a tenderly loved relative, the hope of an inheritance! The death of an aunt or uncle whose tender affection marked one's childhood – another expectation! And the richest and thus the greatest expectation, the death of a father or mother who will leave you mistress of the house where you were born! Sad and odious expectation, which will come only with the toll of the bell ..and of the earth falling on the casket! The young soul of your daughter is revolted by this idea. Where those who chase fortunes see an heiress, she sees an orphan. Where worldly people see only a grand estate or family line, she perceives the bitterness of a grand sorrow."

Nettement goes on to say how tiring leisure is, how boring discussing clothes can be, what a suffering is the emptiness a young demoiselle experiences.

This was the society that Marie Eugénie may have seen in Metz and Preisch, but in which, too young and innocent, she had not fully participated. During the five years following her mother's death, she would be thrown into it and find herself terribly alone. She was still reeling from the terrible shock of losing her mother and sorrow engulfed her. Then, the questions that suffering – and also adolescence – raise, began to trouble her. She wondered about the meaning of life and the meaning of her life. About whom she loved and who loved her. About time and eternity. She was unhappy, without answers and consolation from her faith

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Alfred Nettement. *De la seconde éducation des filles*. Jacques Lecoffre: Paris, 1867, p.viii.

and without any real friends. She entrusted herself and her thoughts to no one, ceased going to Church and to the sacraments. Her dreams and ideals began to fade.

Five years of her precious life, from age 15-19, are spent in this society of "grownups" : first, in the liberal, unbelieving society of her family at Châlons, then Paris, in the stuffy but "worldly" milieu of pious Catholics who bored her to death. She finds herself loving the world, enjoying its pleasures, but unable to share the frivolity and superficiality of the unbelievers. at the same time, she wants something more, to do something good with her life, but cannot share the piety and narrowness, prejudices and values of the "good" Catholics with whom she lives.

Life for women of her position and age seems superficial and futile. Eugénie is struck by the great value and power of money, by women her age striving to make "good" marriages.²⁵ Indeed, for her father, undoubtedly, the best thing for Eugénie would be for her to marry. The suitors are not lacking. His daughter does not declare that she is not interested, but no one pleases her.

Anne Marie Eugénie Milleret de Brou is young, intelligent and pretty. She is free, enjoying a great deal of liberty,²⁶ but has no idea what she wants to do with it or with her life.

"My thoughts are a troubled sea that weighs on me and wearies me...pursued by I know not what anxious need of knowledge and of truth...And then all my heart's dreams, my need of affection that nothing can satisfy, the communion between souls that is impossible here below..."

At eighteen, this young woman desires to do something good with her life: something for others, "to fulfill my duty of activity."²⁷

After her conversion, when her life is illumined by faith in Christ, when she has set out on the adventure as Foundress of a Congregation and initiator of an educational project, when she is still too young to understand the mysterious ways of God and life, she will write: "How I regret those five beautiful years of my youth, lost for me and for others."²⁸

CONVERSION and a LIFE PROJECT - A PHILOSOPHY AND A PASSION

The conversion experience of Eugénie Milleret during that Lent of 1836, was not a sudden inexplicable experience of Christ or a great light; rather it came in the form of intellectual conviction as the words of Lacordaire laid doubt after doubt to rest and answered her anguished questions. There is a Hindu saying that God comes in the form in which we desire Him. Eugénie needed intellectual peace, answers; God came to her as she desired. She was converted simultaneously to Jesus Christ as universal Liberator and inaugurator of God's Kingdom and to the Church as instrument of the Kingdom, "holding the secret of all good." She understood that the Kingdom was the goal of this world and that each one has a vocation to work towards that magnificent goal.²⁹ She was convinced that to choose any other path than that of service of this God and this Kingdom would lead, not just to a life of egoism, but to

²⁵ We find an indictment of this society in more than one document, e.g. *Conseils d'Education*.

²⁶ Letter to Msgr. Gros L.1504. Liberty will always characterize Eugénie. Not having been brought up in a Catholic family, she was spared the Jansenism that still marks many a French Catholic.

²⁷ *Notes Intimes*, pN.152. This is the end of the quotation above.

²⁸ Letter to Father Combalot,

²⁹ Unfortunately, we no longer have the manuscript of the this letter which is found in the *Origines*, Vol. 1:2, IX. It is not dated in the *Origines* but internal evidence would place it in the early years of the foundation when Father Le Saint was the community's confessor, 1841-1844. See also, *Les Textes Fondateurs*, pp. 115-1120 fr..

unhappiness. All was summed up in the Augustinian idea of the "two Cities" : of love of God and of self-love. One chose either to love God to the point of forgetting self or to love self to the point of forgetting God. Her choice was clear. The desire to do good, to give herself to a great cause, was re-enchanted in her heart. New horizons opened before her youthful heart - and beautiful years.

She began, under Lacordaire's direction, what she was to call "the renovation of my intelligence".³⁰ She studied the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, read the Church's classics of spirituality. (It seemed she learned enough Latin in three months to read St. Thomas Aquinas!) She began to see and think as a Christian: in terms of ultimate values, in terms of God's plan for humankind and the world, in terms of Christ, his Gospel and his Kingdom. At the same time, she was introduced to the ideas and the school of Lamennais, the prophet who envisioned a renewal of the Church, a transformation of society by the message of Christ. All her political and social ideals were elevated, transformed, acquired a spiritual and eternal dimension.³¹ The dimensions of the Kingdom. She had acquired a philosophy (a vision? an ideology?)³² and a passion burned in her heart. What was to be her role in this great program, her action? She was sure that she wanted to belong to God, to devote all her energies to his glory and service. But how?

L'Abbé Combalot had the answer and right from God! Eugénie Milleret was to found a religious Congregation devoted to the education of women. It was through women that the moral regeneration of the people would come. "The woman has been elevated."

The *Introduction to the Constitutions* which Father Combalot will write for the new Congregation contains the foundations of what we shall understand as the "Christianization of the intelligence", and translates many other Mennaisian ideas into an educational project. The core goals and guiding principles of Assumption education have become clear for Eugénie. Her vision, her intuition concerning Assumption education was all of a piece; at age twenty-two, at the latest twenty-five, Eugénie knew what the Assumption should be; the rest was just a question of experiments and experience, of the concrete realization of her work, bringing the statue out of the marble.

It is worthwhile mentioning that, through Father Combalot, Eugénie came into contact, not with just books and ideas, but also with other like-minded priests and laity. Among them was Father Emmanuel d'Alzon, whose mentor had been Lamennais. He would be the friend, councilor, spiritual director and collaborator in the apostolate. This was a new experience of the Church and with her sisters and new friends, created bonds that would be closer than those of family. (Communion experience in *Notes Intimes*, N.178.)

NEED for a NEW KIND of EDUCATION

³⁰ Letter 1501 to Lacordaire, 13 December 1841. *Ibid.*, p. 103 fr.

³¹ Letter 1610 to d'Alzon, 12 March 1844. "When later I came to God, their ideas [of her mother and of two men. See note 6 above.] gave me strength, and I admit to you, I could not imagine Our Lord in a manner that attached me more to him than when I saw Him bringing to this world a law whose effect should be, as I said above [that no man would have to suffer any fatality other than that of nature; that is, where the Christian principle would tend to cast off the oppression of others, of man by man...]"

³² "We will not reach the true intellectual superiority necessary to Catholics today ...except by the superiority of the character of the teachers and students, of the passion that animate them, the philosophy that should direct them... If one were to steep characters in the force of the Gospel; if souls were set on fire for the truth of God and for his Reign; if the Wisdom revealed by the very Son of God, and the knowledge of the relationship of all beings became the philosophy, the principle and the end of our studies? L.1627

Although Eugénie had not read much of anything about schooling and education, she seemed to know quite clearly not only what was needed, but also how she would go about the work of education. She also knew what was open to young people of her milieu and how these schools were viewed by the families. On one or the other score, all the existing types of education for women were wanting:

The convent school, and perhaps others, were found to be too old-fashioned, too cloistered both materially and mentally. They may have had a good reputation as being "safe" places for young women and some were even considered fashionable, but they had failed to move with the times. The curriculum was either too weak or invested in subjects "for women only." The bankers, notaries, lawyers that Marie Eugénie had in mind wanted for their daughters "an instruction without limits!"³³ They demanded a variety of courses and modern methods.

According to Marie Eugénie, the people she had in mind judged that the education offered by the orders founded specifically for teaching, did not give enough attention to the individual or watch over the students sufficiently. Most just didn't make the mark. And the few that did were Monarchists! Marie Eugénie wasn't saying it aloud, but the sector of society that most interested her was composed mainly of the forward-looking, — often unbelieving— Republicans who would experience difficulty in mixing with not just the pious, narrow, Catholics, but with those who worked actively towards the restoration of the monarchy, and the privileges of the aristocracy.³⁴ Of a different color politically.

The fashionable boarding schools for girls were unthinkable for respectable families. Even the families professing no faith would not entrust their daughters to them. Education by private professional teachers was no better and the majority of textbooks were hostile to the Catholic faith.³⁵

These were reasons why families were open to an alternative education and reasons the sisters could give, at least in part, to Church authorities for the existence of the Assumption.

But the real reason why Marie Eugénie had founded the Assumption was her grasp of the mystery of Christ and Truth, her understanding of the Gospel message and her vision of Society and the Kingdom. In the light of Christian faith, of Christ, the Incarnation, everything made sense to her, everything came together. She believed that the Gospel had answers to the aspirations and problems of her times. She believed in the terrestrial consequences of the Gospel law if it were lived, in its power to transform society. She was confident that women could be a force to bring about that change. It was a question of understanding the people and the times, of educating with a modern Christian and Gospel perspective. "Clearly what we need today, she declared, "are religious orders in touch with the characters, minds, I would even say, the energies and physical forces of our times."³⁶

Fifty years after the foundation, in 1889, reflecting on the past and on essentials of the Assumption, Marie Eugénie spoke to the sisters about the idea or "principle that should preside over our decisions, our efforts and our works." The Mother Foundress is in her seventies; the passion is still there, but the expression is perhaps more humble, serene and even pious:

We had all experienced the problem of a teaching inspired by diverse principles that were worldly or anti-Catholic. It wasn't that people had decided to distance us from the name of God or did not want religion to be the foundation of our learning; there just weren't any convictions. We read all sorts of books and had

³³ Letter 1504 to Msgr. Gros, 1841. *Foundation Texts*, p. 86 fr.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 86 fr.

³⁵ "Most of the books employed in the education of women are not conformable to Catholic faith or are openly hostile to it." Letter to Lacordaire, 4 February 1842. *Foundation Texts*, p.109, fr.

³⁶ Letter to Father d'Alzon, 5 August 1844.

teachers of different beliefs. And it was impossible to have reached our age, with a certain intellectual formation – Mother Thérèse Emmanuel felt the same way as I did – without realizing the immense problem posed by having in one's mind so many things that had not all been founded on the truth.

Thus the principle that we wanted to place as the foundation of our work was to give the students ideas based on our Christian faith, the faith of the Church. Indeed, we would cease to have our *raison d'être*, if we were ever to propose anything else, if this were not always the foundation on which we build our education for youth.³⁷

I do not think Marie Eugénie was thinking of the catechism or of Papal pronouncements; but rather of the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that can found and orient our understanding of life and the world: the Creator, the human being created in the image of God, Jesus Christ, the Incarnation, the Kingdom. These truths opened horizons, inspired great ambitions, encouraged creativity. This was what she did not find elsewhere.

To understand Marie Eugénie's thought, we must beware of that kind of Catholic mentality that would restrict vision and cramp liberty. Her gift was to be rooted in the great Christian Tradition while being free, of most of the accumulated prejudices, biases and fears of her Catholic contemporaries. Her approach, when she set out to found the Assumption way in education was fresh and free – with discernment and intelligence!³⁸

But these were the ideas that she dared not expose too openly for they could shock the clergy either by their newness or their resemblance to those of the condemned Lamennais.³⁹ By their deeply spiritual tenor! The ardor, vigor and utter conviction of the young Foundress also could have been more than a little disconcerting.

Love of the Church, an experience of the Church as she had come to know it, was another important element incorporated into Assumption education from the beginning. Marie Eugénie never separated Christ from his Church. She had discovered the true reality of the Church as the presence of Christ in human history, as an abundant source of wisdom and good works.

She had experienced the friendship and communion of other Catholics believing as she did and working in the same direction. That, too, she wanted young people to experience. Too many knew only Church communities that were, at best, pious but uninformed, out of touch with the day's realities and young spirits; at worst, full of prejudices, narrow-minded and far from Gospel values. The learning community was a place to discover, grow, love, serve, to celebrate, an experience of the Church.

A PHILOSOPHY, A PASSION, A STRONG CHARACTER

The young Marie Eugénie Milleret is harsh in her judgments as the young often are. It is quite possible and probable that one or other of the schools addressed one or even several of the points above which she deplored and decried. In the end, what is unique at the Assumption,

³⁷ *Instruction*, 28 April 1889.

³⁸ An illustration of her mentality: in a letter to Father d'Alzon: "Diocesan works are doing a lot of harm in France, mainly by hindering more general works. They cannot have the same influence, the same independence. Didn't I already tell you: the Council of Trent, and all the reform movement that followed aimed at restoring the authority of the bishops, to suppress abuses. Today, so that everything in the Church does not become small, we have to act in the opposite direction. We have arrived at an excess of the former impulsion. The liberty and the independence of the religious Orders is necessary today in order to give some direction to studies, some energy to education, to preaching, to the religious spirit..." 1843

³⁹ Undated "letter to Lacordaire." See note 30 above.

I believe, is the way Mother Marie Eugénie perceived the whole and then combined the diverse elements harmoniously. It is this combination of diverse elements that became the Assumption way in education, that is unique.

Her very first instruction, the *Counsels on Education*, established what is known today as the family spirit at the Assumption: an atmosphere and manner of relating to the students. The young Mother Foundress starts off with the lofty aim of the educational project, mainly character education, but very quickly goes off on the type of relationship that should exist between teachers and pupils. The rest of the document is about love.⁴⁰ Thus, the matrix of Assumption education became a kind of family, or community, created by relationships of respect, affection and commitment to each other. Students and teachers would be close together and both would be stimulated to go beyond their laziness and egoism, to become their best selves, committed to Christ, to each other, to the Church and world. No doubt, the personality of Marie Eugénie was felt everywhere both by the high ideals put before everyone and the amount of love poured out.

No other *Counsels* followed, but the work of education began. The first few students arrived, ranging in age from five to twelve! Sister Augustine was busy preparing courses. Textbooks were composed or re-written in such a way as to offset their anti-Christian bias and to include the conviction that all knowledge is a way to God and a way to collaborate in his plan.⁴¹ The emphasis is not on learning facts or even in just understanding many things. The desire of the Assumption is that the intelligence be formed in such a way that it animate and direct the will. That one act according to reason and have reasons for acting!

The development of the intelligence:

“...is not in the quantity of things learned, but in the growth of the intelligence and character through the truth, that broader studies present from a variety of points of view. What is it in studies that makes character and intelligence grow? What is it that powerfully coordinates all that is learned, creates the relationships, gives a goal, a reason? In one sense, it is a philosophy; in another, broader sense, it is a passion...Passion for the faith, passion of love. passion to put into practice the law of Christ.”⁴²

From the letter quoted above, we have what is probably the most pithy expression of our philosophy of education and a phrase that many of you already know: “A philosophy, a passion, a strong character.”

The sisters became somewhat notorious as being "savantes"⁴³ because they studied the sciences and learned Latin. Marie Eugénie thought that this was rather ridiculous and was, perhaps, amused. She saw even that criticism as positive because capable of drawing the students the sisters wanted to have.

⁴⁰ "Beyond the eternal inconstancy of human feelings and so that you may not fail, you have the indefectible strength of Jesus Christ, whom nothing tires, nothing discourages, nothing stops, the One who always loved, is also always ready to pour divine charity into the hearts of his own. When ours is exhausted and our soul becomes almost bitter; when boredom, suffering and disgust seemed to have taken away our strength, let us go to Him, let us let Him love in us. Let us abandon ourselves to his virtue, and Jesus...will teach us that none of our efforts should be the last and that zeal, like the divine love from which it descends, never says: I have done enough." CE cité en *Textes Fondateurs*, ed. française, p. 551.

⁴¹ "My method will be to stay as close as possible to Jesus Christ, so I can judge by his light, since even in purely natural matters, we must never cease to look for the plan[designs] of the Creator; designs that the Savior alone can reveal to us ." Ibid. p. 535.

⁴² This is a rather free translation, to make clear the meaning, as I understand it, of a difficult but important passage of a letter to father d'Alzon in 1844. L.1627.

⁴³ Letter to Msgr. Gros, L. 1504, op. cit..

A point that would also draw criticism from Church authorities was the contact with the poor. If the aim of education was to prepare for life, this meant for Marie Eugénie not just the life that one could expect in one's own milieu, but also life as it is lived by others. By the great number of others, the poor. What we call, 'exposure' today, already existed during the very beginnings of the Assumption. Firsthand contact with the daily existence of the poor, their struggles and hardships, was a requisite and a privilege for students. They were also expected to commit themselves to action, now as well as in the future, to create a better society. In their "Associations," small groups of students who met to help each other progress and for which the students themselves took responsibility, they collected and marked down their contributions to the needy. The social ideal was concretized in whatever ways possible.

When in 1848, the Republic finally dawned in France, it was a day of triumph. Marie Eugénie hastened to write Father d'Alzon:

"No one more than us has been founded with a view to this society of the future whose coming we greet. All our efforts, our teaching, are in perfect conformity with the national aim such as it is proclaimed. We should not allow ourselves to be confused with other Orders, that are very esteemed, but which, we ought to agree, haven't at all the same spirit."

She was thirty, and the failure of the Republic to correspond to her dreams represented a new, and perhaps final, disillusion. In the Church, she had been shocked to discover just men instead of Apostles, she was often bitter or scrupulous about not being able to express things as she saw them for fear of compromising the success of the new congregation, she was scandalized sometimes and generally put off by "pious Catholics, laity and priests, but she persevered in her hope of a more just and Evangelical society. Now, the Republicans were killing the Republic! The Old Guard came back into power, the economics of the rich prevailed, and, in a few years, there would be new emperor! Her vision was not a Utopia, it would take longer. Marie Eugénie had to deal with time, but she never lowered her ideal or lost her vision. She did become older, more conservative, more concerned with structures and rules. But she never showed bitterness or discouragement.

These were the early years. All the originality and genius of Marie Eugénie Milleret had been expressed; the following years are the continual putting into practice of these fundamental elements, all of them, as a whole.

"The aim of this school is to offer to parents,
all the breadth of instruction that is required for young women in the world
today, along with all the guarantees of a religious education,
and to combine a deeply Christian orientation with serious studies.. "

(Brochure for the school at Auteuil cited above.)⁴⁴.

It goes without saying that such an education places stiff demands on those responsible for the education offered. The Assumption way in education requires much and I believe it ends up being a way of life for the teacher. From the very beginning, when Marie Eugénie spoke to the first sisters about their role as educators (*Counsels on Education*), she shows that she realized that her ideal was lofty and costly. Moreover, she realized and accepted also that not all the students would measure up to her ideal as products of an Assumption Education. That did not deter her from making the effort.

Nor did she plan on educating great numbers. Her idea was that an education in depth rather than in extension would have its effect. "Une action tranchée dans une petite sphère. A decisive action in a small sphere."

⁴⁴ Archives of the Assumption at Auteuil, Paris.

We feel that it is a privilege to receive this education as well as to give it; that all who are engaged in such a mission will find plenty of work and a good deal of suffering, but also a spiritual and human richness along with great joy and peace.

* * * * *

Although I do not have time to develop the idea, I would like to suggest that Marie Eugénie Milleret, for her breadth of vision, depth of intelligence and daring, belongs among the great educators in the European tradition. In the Western Tradition (and in all traditions, I believe), there have always been those who considered that moral education was true education, at least as important as intellectual education.

Very close to Marie Eugénie, just across the channel, contemporaries had the same preoccupation: Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby who created a model center of religious discipline and intellectual culture and John Henry Newman (1801-1890), the famous Catholic convert from Anglicanism, who was Rector of a Catholic University in Dublin and author of the *Ideal of a University*. Their ideal was the Christian gentleman, a man of character and intelligence animated by a love of truth, piety and justice

In face of the rising secularization which also challenged Catholic doctrine, Newman sought to help his contemporaries exercise their intelligence as believers and to show that they could be faithful to God and to their Catholic religion as well as to the lights and demands of reason. I believe that Marie Eugénie wanted to do something very similar for women. And more...

* * * * *

A vision of faith which is the horizon of all activities and which permeates every dimension (aspect) of the educational process

A **social vision** and goal inspired by the Gospel Kingdom.

Both of the above require and assure a **broadness of view**.

Studies that respond to contemporary aspirations and needs, taking into account the newness of one's times.

Incorporation of the best in **modern methods and theories of education**.

Importance given to the **individual**: talents, weaknesses, special "character of one's grace."

Insistence on **character formation** in a spirit of liberty, energy of mind and will.

Emphasis on the natural **virtues: kindness, sincerity, honesty, generosity**

those qualities which make a good human person (in the image of Christ).

An Augustinian confidence in the power and attraction of the Good, the Beautiful and Truth, so that persons are inspired to correspond by **desire rather than by obligation** or duty.

Basic attitudes of openness, trust, liberty which allow people to be themselves, to be known, to become their best self.

An experience of **community or family** which is a place of untiring love, of a "conspiracy" for good, of belonging.

A **love of the Church** as the presence and action of God in the world, continuing the mission of Christ, the instrument of the Kingdom. Possessing the secret of good: giving truth, wisdom, charity and hope. A community of saints and sinners, our family.

Sister Clare Teresa, r.a.
19 July, 1998

PRINCIPLES of ASSUMPTION EDUCATION

The entire educational process should be oriented by faith: Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the Kingdom.

In guiding the students' search for Truth, we recognize God as the source and the Kingdom of God as the goal of truth wherever it is found.

In every area of educational endeavor, we make a constant effort to develop simultaneously and harmoniously, a Christian intelligence, moral character and social conscience.

or

In every area of educational endeavor, make a constant effort to develop simultaneously and harmoniously, an intelligence, moral character and social conscience inspired by the teachings of Christ (Christ and the Gospel).

Our aim is an intelligence enlightened by faith, a character both strong and energetic in the practice of the natural virtues, a commitment to others and society.

In character formation, emphasis should be placed, not on exterior appearances and practices but on growth in the natural virtues: kindness, charity, truthfulness, sincerity.

Become a good human being in the image of Christ.

Broaden the intelligence to the profit of virtue and cultivate qualities of the heart rather than egoism and vanity.

Education is [a work of] liberation which transforms the person and society.

Faith which elevates and transforms [the person] and makes [endeavors] fruitful and fulfilling.

The basic core of an educational program should be to enable students to read, write and express themselves in such a way as to take command of their own lives and work.

We must live what we teach.

All those involved in the educational process are expected to work continually on their own growth in virtue, in the Christian understanding of whatever they are teaching.

Beyond the inconsistency of human feelings, the teachers count on the indefectible love of Christ which is given them, so that no effort is ever the last.

Teachers love their students with a love that is energetic, understanding, untiring.

Try to understand and love one's times, the society and mentality of our students.
Learn and use modern methods.

Inspire and explain rather than command. Use the force of authority only as a last resort when the welfare of the student is at stake.

MOTHER MARIE EUGENIE and the ASSUMPTION WAY in EDUCATION

The Educational theory of the Assumption is directly related to the experience of Mother Marie Eugénie: her home upbringing and her discovery of the Catholic faith. In her home, Eugénie Milleret received a rather exceptional intellectual and moral formation, through formal and informal instruction. Later, her religious conversion had a strong intellectual component and the ideas of teachers like Lamennais helped her to form a coherent philosophy of education. Lastly, the experience of Marie Eugénie and the first communities of the Assumption arrived at what we can call "the Assumption Way" which is found and easily recognized in all Assumption educational endeavors, no matter how varied in kind and cultural insertion.

I have chosen to follow a narrative and biographical approach as the most reliable in sharing with you the philosophy and pedagogy of Mother Marie Eugénie, since I believe it will give you the best grasp of the essentials and permit you more easily to transpose those essentials into your own educational context.

In point of fact, Mother Marie Eugénie did not really take the time to develop her thought in writing. We draw her teaching from a great many documents but only two are systematic treatments of Assumption education. One is the *Counsels on Education* written by Marie Eugénie for her little group of sisters at the very beginning of the Congregation. (This document sounds like the first in a series of instructions—which is not followed up with others—and concerns mainly the moral formation of the students and the sisters' contact with them as religious.) The other is a report made up for a government inspection in 1848⁴⁵ (after seven years of experience), which gives a fair idea of the Assumption school, its objectives, curriculum and activities. There are also a few *Instructions* of Marie Eugénie which treat our style of education and give insight into the spiritual and theological foundations of the Assumption aims and philosophy. A few contain also some pedagogical elements. Early brochures give an idea of the discourse employed with prospective parents.

It was in various letters for different occasions that Marie Eugénie presented what seems to me her most important insights into Assumption education: the vision, the philosophy and passion that animated her. The letters, usually written in response to some challenge or difficulty, give the impression that the ideas are very clear to the Foundess, but they often come across to me as intuitions and ideas that I have had to struggle with when I wanted to explain them to my contemporaries. Perhaps Marie Eugénie was also struggling to express herself. She was a woman of action more than of words.

One of the difficulties - and one of the graces of Marie Eugénie - is the yoking of a great spiritual vision or end, with the practical means of achieving it. There is a kind of hiatus between this world and the next which escapes our concepts and words. (Like the already-present and yet-to-come of the Kingdom.)

In any case, when we put all the pieces together we have a full, rich and complete philosophy of education for the Assumption today.

The CHILD and FOUNDATIONS: CHARACTER FORMATION

Although Marie Eugénie suffered the discord between her parents and their final separation, the death of siblings and the loss of her father's fortune, she considered her childhood a happy one.⁴⁶ This was largely due to the extraordinary influence of her mother whom, she tells us, she did not just love, but adored.⁴⁷ This was undoubtedly due to the charm and force of her mother's personality, but the frequent and prolonged absences of her father, along with his lack of tenderness, are to be taken into consideration too.

⁴⁵ "Un projet éducatif au 19^e siècle," *Etudes d'Archives*, Vol. 5, p. 54.

⁴⁶ Letter to Father Combalot, 14 July 1837.

⁴⁷ *Notes Intimes*, N.178/01 (1841).p

Her mother was not particularly affectionate with the young Eugénie⁴⁸, but she apparently took great interest in her only daughter's education. Indeed, this was probably the chief attention that Eugénie received and her mother's way of showing her affection. It would seem also that no effort was lost on the young Eugénie. Her mother died when she was only fifteen but Marie Eugénie constantly cites her mother's words of wisdom and refers back to the education she received from her mother as exemplary. In fact, she mentions no other tutor or household member in connection with her upbringing.

Eugénie does not say anything about the influence of her father, but we surmise that ideas were important in the Milleret family and know that she was instructed, as well as influenced, by the conversations of her parents and their guests.⁴⁹ Her father was deeply involved in politics and from him, perhaps, she inherited what she labeled a "passion" for social and political questions. Her father's profession, however, was banking and perhaps from his side, Marie Eugénie acquired the facility with finances that was so useful to her—and to Father d'Alzon—all through the years of their opening houses, building and running convents and institutions.

We do have to conclude, moreover, that Marie Eugénie was, herself, an exceptionally gifted child: intelligent and thoughtful, sensitive and self-motivated, high in both intuition and analytic capability. Her early correspondence reveals a strong sense of herself: that she was well-born, intelligent and good-looking;⁵⁰ a strong sense of nobility and honor, of the traits that ennobled, like integrity, straightforwardness, goodness, courage and generosity, and an equally strong sense of the things that debased. Although she may have been aware of it only later, the child Eugénie saw plenty of vice both in her entourage as well as in her own family and lets us understand that it consisted in sexual immorality⁵¹ and excess, vanity and superficiality. Looking back over her youth, she expresses in several letters and spiritual notes, the belief that God, himself, had protected her in a special way from falling into such a style of life and sin.

Surely, her mother also played a major role in protecting her daughter. I suggest that she kept her daughter busy and trained her to take interest in many things. Then we can assume that she introduced Eugénie to the best of her French and European culture⁵²: literature, poetry, art the intellectual heritage; and above all, an understanding of what made a good and worthy person—the positive development of character through virtue. Later on, Marie Eugénie will refer to the natural virtues as the fundamental and necessary basis of a spiritual and Christian life.

We find constant references to duty and a kind of conviction, instilled by her mother, that each person has grace, or what is necessary, to fulfill one's duty.⁵³ Eugénie grew up feeling responsible, not only for herself, but also for others, for society. This was the age of poets who took up the cause of the poor, of novelists like Georges Sand and Victor Hugo and of a series of social philosophers and "activists." Marie Eugénie knew them and we know also that the "social question" was a familiar subject in the Milleret family. But concern for the poor was not just a matter of theory; Eugénie's mother took responsibility for the simple farmers and workers in the environs.

A word that Marie Eugénie uses often to describe her mother is "energetic." She tells us that her education was "strong" (*forte*), solid.⁵⁴ It is obvious that her mother wanted her to be a strong woman, to be able to act, to run a house, care for others, and to bear up under stress and difficult situations. She not

⁴⁸ The only photograph we have of Madame Eugénie Milleret is horribly severe and Marie Eugénie tells us that her mother considered caresses and such signs of affection as too soft and debilitating. Letter to Father Combalot, L.3, 14 Juillet 1837.

⁴⁹ The ideas of her mother and of two men [unidentified] had deeply influenced Marie Eugénie. "These two minds seem to have been eminent, as well as that of my mother; both were ardent democrats, not for the vain details of daily politics, which could never seriously interest me, but for the future, the destiny, the moral nobility of our country." L.1610 to d'Alzon. See also note 31 below. "

⁵⁰ *Notes Intimes*, N.162/01 (1839).

⁵¹ *Notes Intimes*, N.185/03 (1842), N.208, Retreat notes of 1850.

⁵² She was fluent in German.

⁵³ Letter to Fathe Gros, L.1504 (1841), Letter to Emmanuel d'Alzon 19 Juillet 1843, Introduction to the *Conseils sur l'Education*, 1842.

⁵⁴ To Father Combalot, 3 January 1839: "education that my mother made energetic [*forte*] if not Christian."

only recalled occasions when her mother trained her to be strong , but also saw her mother give the example.⁵⁵ By osmosis, without questioning, she learned to take things on herself, to spare others, to be aware of the people around her, to be attentive to needs and to make things easier for others. One of her childhood friends, a cousin, recounts several instances of Eugénie's strength of character and adult sense of kindness.⁵⁶ In a letter to Father D'Alzon about education, Mother Marie Eugénie tells how her mother had taught that one of a woman's roles is to smooth relationships as one does by putting cotton between crystals to keep them from breaking.⁵⁷

Despite the care and concern, and even the severity, that went into Eugénie's education, she enjoyed a high degree of liberty. This attitude on the part of her mother went along with the sense of responsibility and duty inculcated in her at a young age. Eugénie, moreover, revered her mother's authority and obviously obeyed more out of the desire to please her rather than out of fear. For this reason alone, authority does not seem to have been invoked often. Probably never in cases of ideas and beliefs.⁵⁸ We don't know if Madame Milleret had read any books on education, but J.J.Rousseau surely lurked somewhere in the background and liberty was certainly at the heart of her parents' Republican creed. We can probably assume that Madame Milleret's respect for her daughter and the liberty she gave her offset her sternness and heavy demands.

In these few paragraphs about the youth of Marie Eugénie, I believe that we find the source of the Assumption stress on Character formation and the seeds of its salient points.

Mention has been made above of various elements of Eugénie's early intellectual formation. Due to a bout with scarlet fever and her fragile health, she spent only a short time in school. But she profited well of that experience and, despite all the negativity she will show later concerning existing schools, she will have only praise for her teachers at the boarding school in Metz. The insistence on reading, writing and speaking one's own language, correctly, simply and clearly may have come from her time at school as she would later tell about the compositions she wrote and the excellent lessons she received in analyzing texts. (The selected texts, moreover, and the topics for composition were educative also because of their moral content⁵⁹). Her math teacher also receives praise⁶⁰ and Marie Eugénie attributes her facility in math to his lessons.

Though her formal education was of short duration, subsequent events would show that she developed a great capacity as an autodidact.

As for the fine arts, we are told in an "Instruction"⁶¹, of drawing lessons and, although she considers that for young women, far too much time is given to instruction in piano and music, it is logical to assume for the same reason that she received some training in that field. A recurrent theme, coming either from her education or from her own natural bent, will be later how studies for women should be useful.⁶² We can suppose that this is one more conviction inherited from her mother who did not approve of too much time's being given to subjects that just stimulated the imagination.⁶³ And Marie Eugénie says of herself that she has no interest in metaphysics, but only in those ideas which have practical consequences.⁶⁴

We can conclude that Anne Eugénie Milleret was brought up in the very best of the European tradition. Her mother provided what could be considered the ideal education of the nobility, a humanist formation

⁵⁵ Madame Milleret, herself, had been orphaned at fourteen and her mother had died when she was only ten.

⁵⁶ Testimony of Ernestine Pruneau. Archives of the Assumption, Auteuil.

⁵⁷ L. 19 July, 18432

⁵⁸ Eugénie's attitude towards her father's authority was quite another story. The experience with her parents is complex and this, coupled with her independent nature, made her personally somewhat ambivalent about authority, to say the least. But her personal struggles in this area, did not affect her educational theory. (See *Notes Intimes*, p.)

⁵⁹ *Les Origines*, Vol. I, Ed. 1898, pp. 39-40

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 38-39.

⁶¹ 10 March 1878, *Instructions*.

⁶² L1556 to Father d'Alzon. "We have found that, ordinarily, the instruction women acquire is totally superficial, and thus, without any real use." ... They are "ashamed to do the least useful thing."

⁶³ *Instruction*, 28 April 1889, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Foundation.

⁶⁴ Letter to Father d'Alzon, 27 February.1844.

for the "Compleet" woman. (Comparable to the ideal of nineteenth century education in England for men in the best public schools.)

Had she not become Mother Marie Eugénie, we might have found her the mistress of a salon. Who knows? She might even have founded a school, though I doubt it.

In any case, the story follows...

To sum up:

The young Eugénie had learned to read and write in her own language. She appreciated these courses both for the facility they gave her in expressing herself and for the reflection provoked by assignments.

She had learned good style and pleasure in literature from the analysis of texts.

Although she may have read novels of little value, she was fed on high ideals and knew the attraction of goodness, beauty and truth. I doubt that this just happened, but tend to think that her mother protected her from baser pleasures, more by presenting her with the better things of life than by forbidding her them. A true noblesse. She was brought up not only to know and esteem the best virtues of her culture but also to practice them.

The style of life in her home, and probably her own inborn bent, formed her to a practical sense, to doing and most likely, to keeping busy.

The social ideals that were discussed in the family salon not only inspired noble desires to serve but likewise found concrete expression in service of the poor.

Marie Eugénie appreciated her education and, although she conceded that it had been "half-pagan"⁶⁵, she also considered that it had been a serious and solid education, "more Christian than many that bear the name."⁶⁶

Rare was the child of that milieu who went without any religious education. At age twelve, Eugénie made an extraordinary First Holy Communion. She says that it was without the "usual" preparation, but she had learned some catechism. When we put all the pieces together, I think it is clear that her mother - even if she was not a believer - out of conviction or responsibility to edify those around her - had her children baptized and attended Mass. God was a reality for Marie Eugénie and she prayed. Any instruction she received, however, was not meaningful so that religion, Catholicism, had little relation to her life and the things that she valued. She will later say that Christ had no place in her education and that her studies, on account of their breadth, had raised invincible obstacles to the faith.⁶⁷

THE IN-BETWEEN YEARS: The ADOLESCENT and KNOWING the [her] WORLD

It would be rushing ahead of the story if I were to go immediately to Eugénie's encounter with Christ and conversion to the Church. The world she had lived in with her mother came to an end abruptly when her parents separated, when her mother took her to Paris and very soon after died of cholera within a few hours. Eugénie was just fifteen, only an adolescent, too old for any school we can imagine and too young for marriage. Her childhood had come to an end. During the next five or six years, she will experience a young woman's life, the life of the rich and well-born in the 19th century.

So what did a young Frenchwoman of her position do during the fourteen waking hours of a day? There are meals, to be sure, and in a large family of interesting people or a family that entertains, one could hope for good conversation. A certain amount of time can be spent with one's toilette. [I can remember how boring it was in boarding school when the girls spent hours doing their hair or nails and makeup.] Then one can read if there is a good supply of books, play the piano, embroider and go visiting friends or receive them. A couple of letters from this period in her life, lead us to believe that this was the life-style of the two families which welcomed her. One of them, however, was pious, so we can add a few hours for Church and devotions.

⁶⁵ L.10 to Father Combalot 14 November 1837.

⁶⁶ Letter 1501 to Lacordaire, 13 December 1841. *Textes Fondateurs*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

What both had in common was not just the occupations of the day, but the preoccupations. M. Nettement, in his delightful book on the education of young French ladies, *De la seconde éducation des filles*⁶⁸, tells us what Eugénie will also tell:

"Empty the conversations that turn on marriages and births, the family tree of this one, the dowry of that one, inheritances...Hopes for a fortune about to come, when a word of regret would be more à propos in mouths speaking of such things. The death of a tenderly loved relative, the hope of an inheritance! The death of an aunt or uncle whose tender affection marked one's childhood — another expectation! And the richest and thus the greatest expectation, the death of a father or mother who will leave you mistress of the house where you were born! Sad and odious expectation, which will come only with the toll of the bell and of the earth falling on the casket! The young soul of your daughter is revolted by this idea. Where those who chase fortunes see an heiress, she sees an orphan. Where worldly people see only a grand estate or family line, she perceives the bitterness of a grand sorrow."

Nettement goes on to say how tiring leisure is, how boring discussing clothes can be, what a suffering is the emptiness a young demoiselle's experiences.

This was the society that Marie Eugénie may have seen in Metz and Preisch, but in which, too young and innocent, she had not fully participated. During the five years following her mother's death, she would be thrown into it and find herself terribly alone. She was still reeling from the terrible shock of losing her mother and sorrow engulfed her. Then, the questions that suffering —and also adolescence— raises, began to trouble her. She wondered about the meaning of life and the meaning of her life. About whom she loved and who loved her. About time and eternity. She was unhappy, without answers nor consolation from faith and without any real friends. She entrusted herself and her thoughts to no one, ceased going to Church and to the sacraments. Her dreams and ideals began to fade.

Five years of her precious life, from age 15-19, are spent in this society of "grownups" : first, in the liberal, unbelieving society of her family at Châlons, then Paris, in the stuffy but "worldly" milieu of pious Catholics who bored her to death. She finds herself loving the world, enjoying its pleasures, but unable to share the frivolity and superficiality of the unbelievers. She wants something more, to do something good with her life, but cannot share the piety and narrowness, prejudices and values of the "good" Catholics with whom she lives.

Life for women of her position and age seems superficial and futile. Eugénie is struck by the great value and power of money, by women her age striving to make "good" marriages.⁶⁹ Indeed, for her father, undoubtedly, the best thing for Eugénie would be for her to marry. The suitors are not lacking. His daughter does not declare that she is not interested, but no one pleases her.

Anne Marie Eugénie Milleret de Brou is young, intelligent and pretty. She is free, enjoying a great deal of liberty,⁷⁰ but has no idea what she wants to do with her liberty or with her life.

"My thoughts are a troubled sea that weighs on me and wearies me...pursued by I know not what anxious need of knowledge and of truth...And then all my heart's dreams, my need of affection that nothing can satisfy, the communion between souls that is impossible here below..."

At eighteen, this young woman desires to do something good with her life: something for others, "to fulfill my duty of activity."⁷¹

After her conversion, when her life is illumined by faith in Christ, when she has set out on the adventure as Foundress of a Congregation and initiator of an educational project, when she is still too young

⁶⁸ Alfred Nettement. *De la seconde éducation des filles*. Jacques Lecoffre: Paris, 1867, p.viii.

⁶⁹ We find an indictment of this society in more than one document, e.g. *Conseils d'Education*.

⁷⁰ Letter to Msgr. Gros L.1504. Liberty will always characterize Eugénie. Not having been brought up in a Catholic family, she was spared the Jansenism that still marks many a French Catholic.

⁷¹ *Notes Intimes*, pN.152. This is the end of the quotation above.

to understand the mysterious ways of God and life, she will write: "How I regret those five beautiful years of my youth, lost for me and for others."⁷²

CONVERSION and a LIFE PROJECT - A PHILOSOPHY AND A PASSION

The conversion experience of Eugénie Milleret during that Lent of 1836, was not a sudden inexplicable experience of Christ or a great light; rather it came in the form of intellectual conviction as the words of Lacordaire laid doubt after doubt to rest and answered her anguished questions. There is a Hindu saying that God comes in the form in which we desire Him. Eugénie needed intellectual peace, answers; God came to her as she desired. She was converted simultaneously to Jesus Christ as universal Liberator and inaugurator of God's Kingdom and to the Church as instrument of the Kingdom, "holding the secret of all good." She understood that the Kingdom was the goal of this world and that each one has a vocation to work towards that magnificent goal.⁷³ She was convinced that to choose any other path than that of service of this God and this Kingdom would lead, not just to a life of egoism, but to unhappiness. All was summed up in the Augustinian idea of the "two Cities" : of love of God and of self-love. One chose either to love God to the point of forgetting self or to love self to the point of forgetting God. Her choice was clear. The desire to do good, to give herself to a great cause, was re-enchanted in her heart. New horizons opened before her youthful heart - and beautiful years.

She began, under Lacordaire's direction, what she was to call "the renovation of my intelligence".⁷⁴ She studied the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, read the Church's classics of spirituality. (It seemed she learned enough Latin in three months to read St. Thomas Aquinas!) She began to see and think as a Christian: in terms of ultimate values, in terms of God's plan for humankind and the world, in terms of Christ, his Gospel and his Kingdom. At the same time, she was introduced to the ideas and the school of Lamennais, the prophet who envisioned a renewal of the Church, a transformation of society by the message of Christ. All her political and social ideals were elevated, transformed, acquired a spiritual and eternal dimension.⁷⁵ The dimensions of the Kingdom. She had acquired a philosophy (a vision? an ideology?)⁷⁶ and a passion burned in her heart. What was to be her role in this great program, her action? She was sure that she wanted to belong to God, to devote all her energies to his glory and service. But how?

L'Abbé Combalot had the answer and right from God! Eugénie Milleret was to found a religious Congregation devoted to the education of women. It was through women that the moral regeneration of the people would come. "The woman has been elevated."

The *Introduction to the Constitutions* which Father Combalot will write for the new Congregation contains the foundations of what we shall understand as the "Christianization of the intelligence", and translates many other Mennaisian ideas into an educational project. The core goals and guiding principles of Assumption education have become clear for Eugénie. Her vision, her intuition concerning Assumption education was all of piece; at age twenty-two, at the latest twenty-five, Eugénie knew what

⁷² Letter to Father Combalot,

⁷³ Unfortunately, we no longer have the manuscript of the this letter which is found in the *Origines*, Vol. 1:2, IX. It is not dated in the *Origines* but internal evidence would place it in the early years of the foundation when Father Le Saint was the community's confessor, 1841-1844. See also, *Les Textes Fondateurs*, pp. 115-1120 fr..

⁷⁴ Letter 1501 to Lacordaire, 13 December 1841. *Ibid.*, p. 103 fr.

⁷⁵ Letter 1610 to d'Alzon, 12 March 1844. "When later I came to God, their ideas [of her mother and of two men. See note 6 above.] gave me strength, and I admit to you, I could not imagine Our Lord in a manner that attached me more to him than when I saw Him bringing to this world a law whose effect should be, as I said above [that no man would have to suffer any fatality other than that of nature; that is, where the Christian principle would tend to cast off the oppression of others, of man by man...]"

⁷⁶ "We will not reach the true intellectual superiority necessary to Catholics today ...except by the superiority of the character of the teachers and students, of the passion that animate them, the philosophy that should direct them... If one were to steep characters in the force of the Gospel; if souls were set on fire for the truth of God and for his Reign; if the Wisdom revealed by the very Son of God, and the knowledge of the relationship of all beings became the philosophy, the principle and the end of our studies? L.1627

the Assumption should be; the rest was just a question of experiments and experience, of the concrete realization of her work, bringing the statue out of the marble.

It is worthwhile mentioning that, through Father Combalot, Eugénie came into contact, not with just books and ideas, but also with other like-minded priests and laity. Among them was Father Emmanuel d'Alzon, whose mentor had been Lamennais. He would be the friend, councilor, spiritual director and collaborator in the apostolate . This was a new experience of the Church and with her sisters and new friends, created bonds that would be closer than those of family. (Communion experience in *Notes Intimes*, N.178.)

NEED for a NEW KIND of EDUCATION

Although Eugénie had not read much of anything about schooling and education, she seemed to know quite clearly not only what was needed, but also how she would go about the work of education. She also knew what was open to young people of her milieu and how these schools were viewed by the families. On one or the other score, all the existing types of education for women were wanting:

The convent school, and perhaps others, were found to be too old-fashioned, too cloistered both materially and mentally. They may have had a good reputation as being "safe" places for young women and some were even considered fashionable, but they had failed to move with the times. The curriculum was either too weak or invested in subjects "for women only." The bankers, notaries, lawyers that Marie Eugénie had in mind wanted for their daughters "an instruction without limits!"⁷⁷ They demanded a variety of courses and modern methods.

According to Marie Eugénie, the people she had in mind judged that the education offered by the orders founded specifically for teaching, did not give enough attention to the individual or watch over the students sufficiently. Most just didn't make the mark. And the few that did were Monarchists! Marie Eugénie wasn't saying it aloud, but the sector of society that most interested her was composed mainly of the forward-looking, —often unbelieving— Republicans who would experience difficulty in mixing with not just the pious, narrow, Catholics, but with those who worked actively towards the restoration of the monarchy, and the privileges of the aristocracy.⁷⁸ Of a "different color" politically.

The fashionable boarding schools for girls were unthinkable for respectable families. Even the families professing no faith would not entrust their daughters to them. Education by private professional teachers was no better and the majority of textbooks were hostile to the Catholic faith.⁷⁹

These were reasons why families were open to an alternative education and reasons the sisters could give, at least in part, to Church authorities for the existence of the Assumption.

But the real reason why Marie Eugénie had founded the Assumption was her grasp of the mystery of Christ and Truth, her understanding of the Gospel message and her vision of Society and the Kingdom. In the light of Christian faith, of Christ, the Incarnation, everything made sense to her, everything came together. She believed that the Gospel had answers to the aspirations and problems of her times. She believed in the terrestrial consequences of the Gospel law if it were lived, in its power to transform society. She was confident that women could be a force to bring about that change. It was a question of understanding the people and the times, of educating with a modern Christian and Gospel perspective. "Clearly what we need today, she declared, "are religious orders in touch with the characters, minds, I would even say, the energies and physical forces of our times."⁸⁰

Fifty years after the foundation, in 1889, reflecting on the past and on essentials of the Assumption, Marie Eugénie spoke to the sisters about the idea or "principle that should preside over our decisions, our efforts and our works." The Mother Foundress is in her seventies; the passion is still there, but the expression is perhaps more humble, serene and even pious:

We had all experienced the problem of a teaching inspired by diverse principles that were worldly or anti-Catholic. It wasn't that people had decided to distance us from the name of God or did not want religion to be the foundation of our learning; there just weren't any convictions. We read all sorts of books and had teachers of different beliefs. And it was impossible to have reached our age, with a certain intellectual formation —Mother Thérèse Emmanuel felt the same way as I did— without realizing the immense problem posed by having in one's mind so many things that had not all been founded on the truth.

⁷⁷ Letter 1504 to Msgr. Gros, 1841. *Foundation Texts*, p. 86 fr.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 86 fr.

⁷⁹ "Most of the books employed in the education of women are not conformable to Catholic faith or are openly hostile to it." Letter to Lacordaire, 4 February 1842. *Foundation Texts*, p.109, fr.

⁸⁰ Letter to Father d'Alzon, 5 August 1844.

Thus the principle that we wanted to place as the foundation of our work was to give the students ideas based on our Christian faith, the faith of the Church. Indeed, we would cease to have our *raison d'être*, if we were ever to propose anything else, if this were not always the foundation on which we build our education for youth.⁸¹

I do not think Marie Eugénie was thinking of the catechism or of Papal pronouncements; but rather of the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that can found and orient our understanding of life and the world: the Creator, the human being created in the image of God, Jesus Christ, the Incarnation, the Kingdom. These truths opened horizons, inspired great ambitions, encouraged creativity. This was what she did not find elsewhere.

To understand Marie Eugénie's thought, we must beware of that kind of Catholic mentality that would restrict vision and cramp liberty. Her gift was to be rooted in the great Christian Tradition while being free, of most of the accumulated prejudices, biases and fears of her Catholic contemporaries. Her approach, when she set out to found the Assumption way in education was fresh and free — with discernment and intelligence!⁸²

But these were the ideas that she dared not expose too openly for they could shock the clergy either by their newness or their resemblance to those of the condemned Lamennais.⁸³ By their deeply spiritual tenor! The ardor, vigor and utter conviction of the young Foundress also could have been more than a little disconcerting.

Love of the Church, an experience of the Church as she had come to know it, was another important element incorporated into Assumption education from the beginning. Marie Eugénie never separated Christ from his Church. She had discovered the true reality of the Church as the presence of Christ in human history, as an abundant source of wisdom and good works.

She had experienced the friendship and communion of other Catholics believing as she did and working in the same direction. That, too, she wanted young people to experience. Too many knew only Church communities that were, at best, pious but uninformed, out of touch with the day's realities and young spirits; at worst, full of prejudices, narrow-minded and far from Gospel values. The learning community was a place to discover, grow, love, serve, to celebrate, an experience of the Church.

A PHILOSOPHY, A PASSION, A STRONG CHARACTER

The young Marie Eugénie Milleret is harsh in her judgments as the young often are. It is quite possible and probable that one or other of the schools addressed one or even several of the points above which she deplored and decried. In the end, what is unique at the Assumption, I believe, is the way Mother Marie Eugénie perceived the whole and then combined the diverse elements harmoniously. It is this combination of diverse elements that became the Assumption way in education, that is unique.

Her very first instruction, the *Counsels on Education*, established what is known today as the family spirit at the Assumption: an atmosphere and manner of relating to the students. The young Mother Foundress starts off with the lofty aim of the educational project, mainly character education, but very quickly goes off on the type of relationship that should exist between teachers and pupils. The rest of the document is about love.⁸⁴ Thus, the matrix of Assumption education became a kind of family, or

⁸¹ *Instruction*, 28 April 1889.

⁸² An illustration of her mentality: in a letter to Father d'Alzon: "Diocesan works are doing a lot of harm in France, mainly by hindering more general works. They cannot have the same influence, the same independence. Didn't I already tell you: the Council of Trent, and all the reform movement that followed aimed at restoring the authority of the bishops, to suppress abuses. Today, so that everything in the Church does not become small, we have to act in the opposite direction. We have arrived at an excess of the former impulsion. The liberty and the independence of the religious Orders is necessary today in order to give some direction to studies, some energy to education, to preaching, to the religious spirit..." 1843

⁸³ Undated "letter to Lacordaire." See note 30 above.

⁸⁴ "Beyond the eternal inconstancy of human feelings and so that you may not fail, you have the indefectible strength of Jesus Christ, whom nothing tires, nothing discourages, nothing stops, the

community, created by relationships of respect, affection and commitment to each other. Students and teachers would be close together and both would be stimulated to go beyond their laziness and egoism, to become their best selves, committed to Christ, to each other, to the Church and world. No doubt, the personality of Marie Eugénie was felt everywhere both by the high ideals put before everyone and the amount of love poured out.

No other *Counsels* followed, but the work of education began. The first few students arrived, ranging in age from five to twelve! Sister Augustine was busy preparing courses. Textbooks were composed or re-written in such a way as to offset their anti-Christian bias and to include the conviction that all knowledge is a way to God and a way to collaborate in his plan.⁸⁵ The emphasis is not on learning facts or even in just understanding many things. The desire of the Assumption is that the intelligence be formed in such a way that it animate and direct the will. That one act according to reason and have reasons for acting!

The development of the intelligence:

“...is not in the quantity of things learned, but in the growth of the intelligence and character through the truth, that broader studies present from a variety of points of view. What is it in studies that makes character and intelligence grow? What is it that powerfully coordinates all that is learned, creates the relationships, gives a goal, a reason? In one sense, it is a philosophy; in another, broader sense, it is a passion...Passion for the faith, passion of love. passion to put into practice the law of Christ.”⁸⁶

From the letter quoted above, we have what is probably the most pithy expression of our philosophy of education and a phrase that many of you already know: “A philosophy, a passion, a strong character.”

The sisters became somewhat notorious as being "savantes"⁸⁷ because they studied the sciences and learned Latin. Marie Eugénie thought that this was rather ridiculous and was, perhaps, amused. She saw even that criticism as positive because capable of drawing the students the sisters wanted to have.

A point that would also draw criticism from Church authorities was the contact with the poor. If the aim of education was to prepare for life, this meant for Marie Eugénie not just the life that one could expect in one's own milieu, but also life as it is lived by others. By the great number of others, the poor. What we call, "exposure" today, already existed during the very beginnings of the Assumption. Firsthand contact with the daily existence of the poor, their struggles and hardships, was a requisite and a privilege for students. They were also expected to commit themselves to action, now as well as in the future, to create a better society. In their "Associations," small groups of students who met to help each other progress and for which the students themselves took responsibility, they collected and marked down their contributions to the needy. The social ideal was concretized in whatever ways possible.

When in 1848, the Republic finally dawned in France, it was a day of triumph. Marie Eugénie hastened to write Father d'Alzon:

"No one more than us has been founded with a view to this society of the future whose coming we greet. All our efforts, our teaching, are in perfect conformity with the national

One who always loved, is also always ready to pour divine charity into the hearts of his own. When ours is exhausted and our soul becomes almost bitter; when boredom, suffering and disgust seemed to have taken away our strength, let us go to Him, let us let Him love in us. Let us abandon ourselves to his virtue, and Jesus...will teach us that none of our efforts should be the last and that zeal, like the divine love from which it descends, never says: I have done enough." CE cité en *Textes Fondateurs*, ed. française, p. 551.

⁸⁵ "My method will be to stay as close as possible to Jesus Christ, so I can judge by his light, since even in purely natural matters, we must never cease to look for the plan[designs] of the Creator; designs that the Savior alone can reveal to us ." Ibid. p. 535.

⁸⁶ This is a rather free translation, to make clear the meaning, as I understand it, of a difficult but important passage of a letter to father d'Alzon in 1844. L.1627.

⁸⁷ Letter to Msgr. Gros, L. 1504, op. cit..

aim such as it is proclaimed. We should not allow ourselves to be confused with other Orders, that are very esteemed, but which, we ought to agree, haven't at all the same spirit."

She was thirty, and the failure of the Republic to correspond to her dreams represented a new, and perhaps final, disillusion. In the Church, she had been shocked to discover just men instead of Apostles, she was often bitter or scrupulous about not being able to express things as she saw them for fear of compromising the success of the new congregation, she was scandalized sometimes and generally put off by "pious Catholics, laity and priests, but she persevered in her hope of a more just and Evangelical society. Now, the Republicans were killing the Republic! The Old Guard came back into power, the economics of the rich prevailed, and, in a few years, there would be new emperor! Her vision was not a Utopia, it would take longer. Marie Eugénie had to deal with time, but she never lowered her ideal or lost her vision. She did become older, more conservative, more concerned with structures and rules. But she never showed bitterness or discouragement.

These were the early years. All the originality and genius of Marie Eugénie Milleret had been expressed; the following years are the continual putting into practice of these fundamental elements, all of them, as a whole.

"The aim of this school is to offer to parents,
all the breadth of instruction that is required for young women in the world today,
along with all the guarantees of a religious education,
and to combine a deeply Christian orientation with serious studies.. "

(Brochure for the school at Auteuil cited above.)⁸⁸

It goes without saying that such an education places stiff demands on those responsible for the education offered. The Assumption way in education requires much and I believe it ends up being a way of life for the teacher. From the very beginning, when Marie Eugénie spoke to the first sisters about their role as educators (*Counsels on Education*), she shows that she realized that her ideal was lofty and costly. Moreover, she realized and accepted also that not all the students would measure up to her ideal as products of an Assumption Education. That did not deter her from making the effort.

Nor did she plan on educating great numbers. Her idea was that an education in depth rather than in extension would have its effect. "Une action tranchée dans une petite sphère. A decisive action in a small sphere."

We feel that it is a privilege to receive this education as well as to give it; that all who are engaged in such a mission will find plenty of work and a good deal of suffering, but also a spiritual and human richness along with great joy and peace.

* * * * *

Although I do not have time to develop the idea, I would like to suggest that Marie Eugénie Milleret, for her breadth of vision, depth of intelligence and daring, belongs among the great educators in the European tradition. In the Western Tradition (and in all traditions, I believe), there have always been those who considered that moral education was true education, at least as important as intellectual education.

Very close to Marie Eugénie, just across the channel, contemporaries had the same preoccupation: Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby who created a model center of religious discipline and intellectual culture and John Henry Newman (1801-1890), the famous Catholic convert from Anglicanism, who was Rector of a Catholic University in Dublin and author of the *Ideal of a University*. Their ideal was the Christian gentleman, a man of character and intelligence animated by a love of truth, piety and justice

In face of the rising secularization which also challenged Catholic doctrine, Newman sought to help his contemporaries exercise their intelligence as believers and to show that they could be faithful to God and to their Catholic religion as well as to the lights and demands of reason. I believe that Marie Eugénie wanted to do something very similar for women. And more...

⁸⁸ Archives of the Assumption at Auteuil, Paris.

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A **vision of faith** which is the horizon of all activities and which permeates every dimension (aspect) of the educational process

A **social vision** and goal inspired by the Gospel Kingdom.

Both of the above require and assure a **broadness of view**.

Studies that respond to contemporary aspirations and needs, taking into account the newness of one's times.

Incorporation of the best in **modern methods and theories of education**.

Importance given to the **individual**: talents, weaknesses, special "character of one's grace."

Insistence on **character formation** in a spirit of liberty, energy of mind and will.

Emphasis on the natural **virtues: kindness, sincerity, honesty, generosity**
those qualities which make a good human person (in the image of Christ).

An Augustinian confidence in the power and attraction of the Good, the Beautiful and Truth, so that persons are inspired to correspond by **desire rather than by obligation** or duty.

Basic attitudes of openness, trust, liberty which allow people to be themselves, to be known, to become their best self.

An experience of **community or family** which is a place of untiring love, of a "conspiracy" for good, of belonging.

A **love of the Church** as the presence and action of God in the world, continuing the mission of Christ, the instrument of the Kingdom. Possessing the secret of good: giving truth, wisdom, charity and hope. A community of saints and sinners, our family.

Sister Clare Teresa, r.a.
19 July, 1998

THIS IS NOT PART OF MY TALK

Nature and Grace, an Incarnational Way

When there are only eight sisters in the community and one child to be educated!, Marie Eugénie considered it was time to instruct the sisters concerning their role as educators.⁸⁹ She, herself, is only 24, but she expresses the belief (received from her mother) that all beings have what is necessary to fulfill their duties. The aim of our education is to prepare one for the duties of life. The teacher participates in the mission of Christ and finds light in Christ. In fact, the teacher is called to be filled with Christ. As St. Augustine teaches, there are two cities that of egoism and that of disinterested service. Christ's mission reveals a total generosity, that is what is to be taught. Fill students with charity, justice, truth and flee from the worldly education that relies on appearances and conformity. Help raise some of the students above their petty interests to desire the will of God, to be good holy and generous, to fulfill their duties in life great and small.

12 Sept 1843

⁸⁹ In the text, she gives the impression that she is responding to a request. Also that she has not yet had the chance to read the works of others on the subject. I find this rather surprising and an indication, perhaps, of just how sure of herself she felt.

L.1592

l'incarnation est le mystère auquel elles doivent avoir leur dévotion spéciale puisque c'est en ce mystère que toutes les choses humaines ont été divinisée et on trouve leur fin »

.... et que c'est par le mystère de l'Incarnation où un Dieu a fait corporellement les œuvres de miséricorde qu'a été divinisée la charité active à laquelle doivent aussi être formées des femmes destinées à vivre dans le monde