

Joyful Detachment (Slide 1)

Let me begin by thanking Sr. Diana and Sr. Carmen, as well as their respective Councils, for me to give this talk. I hope that you will be able to capture all the small lights that I have received through the study and the prayer on the texts of Saint Marie Eugenie even if they remain an interpretation of her teaching on joyful detachment.

1. Outline of the Presentation (Slide 2)

We will follow the following outline in our presentation. The topic is rather wide and basic in our spirituality and the time allotted to develop this is limited. That is why we will keep to the points that open, just the same, paths to ulterior deepening that I encourage you to fulfill and experience. The presentation consists of four parts:

- An **introduction** in which we will situate joyful detachment as a fundamental element within the charism of the Assumption. This part of the talk will be brief thanks to the wonderful talk of our sister H el ene, who has developed the fundamental features of our spirituality.
- **Joyful Detachment an instrument in the process of simplification.** We will situate in this part this element of our charism in the most genuine spiritual theology.
- **The Teachers of M M^a Eugenie.** The masters of the spiritual life narrate their experiences from a given symbolic universe, conditioned by the socio-cultural-religious atmosphere of which they are part and by which they are formed¹. MME loved to read since her childhood²; the spiritual and secular, contemporary and traditional authors will give her the necessary categories to verbalize her own spiritual experience. MME will articulate her understanding of joyful detachment from the different spiritualities enriched by her own intuitions and those of the first Sisters.
- **Joyful Detachment a particular element of our spirituality.** Finally, in the last part, we will try to present the teaching of Mother Marie Eugenie on Joyful Detachment, giving some brush-strokes to actualize it in our lives.

My intent in each of these sections is to substantiate most of the statements of the writings of Mother Marie Eugenie, which you will find in the footnotes and which you will be able to deepen when you receive the documents of this Congress as well as the authors and works that have supported the analyses and interpretation of these. Without much ado, let us begin with the first point.

2. Introduction (Slide 3)

2.1. Everyone is called to holiness. LGV

The Second Vatican Council, in Chapter V of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, affirms that the call to holiness is inherent in the Christian vocation in whatever state of life it is developed³. Holiness is a gift of the Holy Spirit received by all Christians at Baptism which makes us children of God in Christ and which, with human collaboration, should be deployed in the life of the Christian until its fulfillment in the last times⁴. Holiness is therefore intrinsic to the Christian vocation, but actually this reality that we must recover becomes obvious⁵. Today's Christian, each one of us, have to believe in our own capacity

for holiness so as not to be satisfied merely with the good but believe that with the help of the Spirit we can attain the best⁶. In a society such as ours, needful of models and of projects of life that orient existence, the saints are necessary examples and holiness is a real path of humanization that radiates the same life that rises from the holiness of God of which our world is in need⁷. Mother Marie Eugenie was presented to the Church 3 June 2007 as such a model and we are sure that her example and her teaching can help both laity and religious to follow this path. Paraphrasing K. Rahner we dare to affirm that the Christian of tomorrow will either be a Saint or will not be a Christian⁸; understanding holiness as the Project of life that has in the spiritual experience/s the original and originating dimension of all the other dimensions of existence⁹. MME understood Christian life as a path to holiness. Two texts are relevant in her Notes Intimes, one written shortly after her conversion and the other when she turned 50¹⁰.

2.2. The charism of the Assumption as a "particular way" of living the common call to holiness

The Assumption charism, which is based on the path taken by MME, is a "particular way" of living this common call to holiness within the Church for the world.

2.2.1. Spirituality-Spiritualities

Even if the call to holiness is unique and universal, the fulfillment is differentiated in such a way that we should distinguish "holiness" itself in the ways it is concretized and has been concretized in the different persons throughout history¹¹. This differentiation has distinct nuances, from the consideration of ideal types according to one's personal vocation, say general or state of life (religious, lay and priesthood), to the particular state of each person so we could say that there is a way of holiness for every person that lives it.

2.2.2. Elements of the charismatic personality (Slide 4)

Holiness coincides with the full realization of the human being according to the creative project of God. However, we must point out that this should not be mistaken with psychological maturity¹². The measure or form of human perfection of Christianity is to attain, as St. Paul affirms, the "state of the perfect man, the maturity of fullness in Christ" (Eph 4: 13). That is why holiness, from the anthropological point of view is understood as the fulfillment of the "charismatic personality"¹³, or what comes to the same, the configuration to Christ according to the specific properties that enhance the spirituality related to the characteristics and values of each person¹⁴.

The spirituality of the different institutes or movements offers believers the means or tools to carry out their particular vocation to holiness, becoming in that way what Cencini, an Italian theologian, calls "the charismatic personality" that includes the following elements:

- A given mystical experience that reveals to the believer the elements that form the charism and makes possible the personal experience and knowledge of the divine mystery.
- Some ascetical tools that suggest the practices with which she can freely collaborate with the grace that transforms her in Christ according to her own spirituality.
- The sense of belonging of the one who loves community or the institution of which he/she is part and commits him/herself in and with it.

- A given apostolic commitment, that emerges from the spiritual experience and that calls for a determined action to transform reality according to Kingdom values.

As foundress of the Assumption and graced with the foundation charism, MME, was the first in allowing herself to be fulfilled by this grace that formed in her the charismatic personality and that she proponed to the Sisters in the different documents. Each one of us as foundation stones, has been given this same grace to fulfill this path in our lives, a charism for the world.

Basing ourselves on the writings of Mother Marie Eugenie, which we will develop in successive points, joyful detachment forms part of the ascetical tools of our charism that arise from a given experience of God and are lived in the different dimensions of our life.

3. Joyful Detachment, an instrument in the process of simplification (Slide 5)

Once our topic has been framed in the totality of the spirituality of the Assumption, we will develop the origin, foundation and end of the ascetic means which is none other than a particular spiritual experience that led MME and all of us who feel graced by this charism, to a particular understanding of the mystery of God, of the human being and of the world that necessarily culminates in a call to conversion or transformation in Christ.

Joining the most genuine spiritual tradition, MME states in her own terminology a central element of the Christian spirituality: simplification. Many authors of spiritual theology make of simplicity the essence of the religious experience by the concurrence of this feature in all the traditions. In the different religions, mystery is believed and understood as simple and unitary, that is why it is only possible to relate with it from simplicity. Quite a few authors consider detachment from everything that is not God, the way to attain this simplicity. If detachment achieves personal unity, the simplification of the being, focusing on the one thing necessary..., the radicality of the detachment will be the measure of the proximity to the mystery experienced, believed in and known. Detachment makes the whole being intervene in the religious experience, from an essential form, from a magnificent unification that pacifies it: "I wanted to give myself, not lend myself" affirms MME.¹⁵

3.1. The simplicity of God

In my humble opinion, there are two spiritual experiences and the understanding of the divine mystery that led Mother Marie Eugenie to understand the simplicity of God: God as infinite Goodness that tends to spread itself and the mystery of the Incarnation as historical fulfillment of the Love-Goodness of God. This is undoubtedly the religious experience and the theological foundation of Joyful Detachment in MME. The experience of a God who out of love empties Himself to give life and to give life in these two basic moments of the economy of salvation: creation and redemption that we find in the writings of MME. This understanding of mystery has its origin in the experience of the First Communion, relived and reread at different moments and in the diverse moments of her growth as a Christian, throughout her life.

3.1.1. God Infinite Goodness

In the chapter of 22 July 1883, entitled "The Knowledge of God as Infinite Good Who tends to spread itself", we find the synthesis of the theological formulation of the experience of God of MME¹⁶, which development we can also see in other writings¹⁷. For

MME God is the infinite Good-Goodness¹⁸, who in the overabundance of His love creates all that exists and sustains it with His Providence [Const. 44,12-FT 150-151]¹⁹. It is what we could call the primordial divine detachment which He does joyfully because it arises from love.

The response of the human being to so much good received and recognized cannot be other than that of love that MME develops from three interrelated perspectives: Adoration of the Rights of God, Faith and Love of the Truth, and Joyful Detachment. We will focus on the latter.

3.1.2. Mystery of the Incarnation

The mystery of the Incarnation often appears in the writings of MME²⁰, a mystery she wanted to be central in our spirituality [L.VII, 1590]. This mystery, as I have said, is fundamental to understand joyful detachment because Jesus must be the only model of the same, so that this ascetic tool not becomes something wishful but that it rise as a response for so much love received.

For MME "the humanity of Jesus is the access to the Father" [C. 21.1.72], but a humanity recognized in its uniqueness²¹. On assuming our human nature, the Word, in His humanity divinized everything human²².

Jesus came to earth to reveal the Divine Truth that shows to the human being its genuine identity and the path to the Father who fulfills his creative vocation. [C. 3.3.78-FT 293-298]. The Incarnation, just like the Passion, is the manifestation of the great love of God, of His absolute self-gift to save humanity²³, which MME understands as "loving abasement" [L. VIII, 1611]. This term, together with "annihilation", are the two terms most used by MME to explain the mystery of the Incarnation, which she considers exemplary for detachment from ourselves which is necessary in the exercise of love and of the service of God and of men, the only way to holiness. For that she takes up in one of her Chapters the Incarnation as mystery of sanctification²⁴.

3.2. Human complexity

As we have just affirmed, God is simple, united in His 'Being-Doing' which is love, but the human being is complex, dismembered in a thousand loves that he tries to satisfy without being filled.

We perceive in the writings of MME a great optimism regarding the human condition²⁵ [CE-FT 380]. She affirms that the person has been created by God, in the image of the Word, to live in communion with Him, a communion that sin destroyed [C. 10.3.78-FT 300-301]²⁶. The order was broken because the human being preferred self love to divine love²⁷, which is why it is love that should reestablish the lost communion. The Father, in His infinite goodness, sent the Son, to open anew the path of love and of knowledge [CE-FT 371]. The human being should only welcome the grace that the Father gives through the Son in the Spirit and take the path towards God²⁸. But he is also called to collaborate with grace deciding²⁹ to which lord he will allow to reign within him, as MME affirms: "to selfishness or to disinterested love"³⁰.

For MME, undoubtedly, human growth happens in love, in the how one can channel those forces and energies that are instinctual desires that branch off in many forms and registers, objects of desire but that they will not be able to satisfy even if they fulfill some of its aspirations. The human heart is wounded in love, will remain restless until it rests in God, torn between retreating into its wound, trying to fill the emptiness with fleeting realities or opening itself to the One who gave it being and sustains it in a loving relationship that fills and break off joyfully, though not without suffering, of other loves that enslave it.³¹

The terminology MME uses to describe selfishness which she considers the main cause of personal and social sin is very close to the description that several contemporary authors give of the actual narcissistic tendency. Without attaining pathological levels, these authors consider narcissism as one of the neuroses of our times. The individual centered in on himself does not possess a correct vision of either his person or of the world around him and so is incapable of attaining a balance that will allow him to enjoy the favorable circumstances of life and overcome the adverse, attain love in relationships and commit himself in a task that will fulfill him and with the transformation of the world around him. The wound of desire does not really heal completely. We have to learn to live with it but without allowing it to gain so much strength, that it dominate our life but rather contrasting it with that permanent desire of working and of living seeking only the glory of God³². It is the work of a lifetime wherein one "profits" of what is wounded in it from the basic desire of being fully united with God (love), and to the work for His Kingdom so that He may be the Lord of all. Psychological maturity seen from these authors is equivalent to attaining a de-centering from self, a path that MME offers from a Christian position. She sees that conquering selfishness is part of the vocation to holiness, something that can only be attained with the help of grace, while collaborating with her with different ascetical tools, detachment among them. We can understand from these observations the affirmation of MME that the Kingdom of God comes in one's life [C. 14.7.78-FT 341], in the love for God that conquers selfishness that turns in on itself.

This salvific movement of creation-sin and of redemption-grace is keys in the understanding of the anthropology of MME and of her understanding of the process of sanctification, doctrines in which she bases not only spiritual teaching but also of pedagogy itself. Her pedagogy is built on this idea when she exhorts educators to help the students to curb selfishness as a necessary condition to attain personal happiness and so that they may engage themselves in the transformation of society. The mission of education is to restore the natural virtues obscured by this original deviation³³; detachment, therefore, also has a pedagogical importance and application.

MME conceives spiritual growth as a return to the origin, to the union-communion with God which happens through the imitation of the same model that the Creator used to create the human being: the Incarnate Word [Const. 44, 12-FT 151]. The sanctification of the human being, or his personal growth, will consist in a process of de-centering in which grace and the will intervene by which the person will renounce love of self in virtue of a more and more perfect love for God and from Him to humanity [C. 24.3.78-FT 306-307]. This de-centering or simplification which is attained through detachment is nothing more than the unification of the whole being in God, a heart only for Him³⁴. Therefore the goal is attained in the union with God³⁵. This union is fulfilled within the person where God dwells [C. 10.3.78-FT 303], in that "secret point", as MME says, from which divinity communicates with the creature³⁶. A holiness that is fulfilled in the "life of prayer and of charity" [Const. 40, 30-FT 117-118], and which has as fundamental ascetical tool that which the Word had: detachment.

3.3. *Mary in her Assumption*

MME presents Mary in the mystery of the Assumption as the creature that has fulfilled the Divine Project. Mary, with her faithful and trusting response to the plan of God, breaks with the selfish self-centeredness by collaborating with the divine salvific plan³⁷. This reality perfectly manifested in the mystery of the Annunciation was deployed throughout her life fulfilling the creative divine vocation: the praise and service of God. We find in her the perfection of the dual commandment of love³⁸, her only preoccupation being to love and

serve Jesus Christ³⁹; for that, MME in many occasions presents Mary as the example of detachment that attains its full realization in the glory-joy of the Assumption.

4. *Simplification in the Masters of the Spiritual Life (Slide 6)*

Before presenting the most explicit teaching of MME on detachment, we must mention at least briefly the spiritual authors who could have influenced her. Undoubtedly her first source is the Scriptures, read, meditated, prayed on and lived. It is the nucleus of the revelation we presented previously. But other authors also influenced her.

The teaching on detachment such as MME expresses it is not found in any spiritual writer in what we have as yet been able to read and know but as we have just said, its content is already present in many spiritual teachings some of which influenced her. We will now present briefly those that we think influenced her most:

4.1. *The Augustinian School*

Augustine believes that the end of the spiritual life is the perfection in Love so as to love⁴⁰. Perfect love is a unique right of God but the believer can participate in this perfection through the action of grace and through it can attain that holiness that only belongs to God. To live that love, the person must get rid of all love towards temporal things and of self-love to love God above all of them. Detachment is a means or a tool for that. MME finds in the Augustinian allegory of the "Two Cities" the clearest illustration of the struggle experienced by the person within himself, choosing between living in reference to God or to his selfishness, a conflict reflected in the forces of our world that are opposed to the coming of the Kingdom⁴¹. Leaning on the teachings of the Saint of Hippo, MME believes that the spiritual life must go from love of self to the point of contempt of God to the love of God to the point of contempt of self. [C. 12.1.75; 7.4.1878-FT 308-309; 13.6.84]. Saint Augustine presents Jesus as the model of holiness. With him, MME affirms that knowing and imitating Jesus one can attain this fullness of love⁴².

4.2. *The Rhenish-Flemish School*

From the teachings of this school, it is easy to explain the understanding of the divinity and her insistence on simplicity (*simplicidad-sencillez*) as necessary conditions so that union with God can happen for which a detachment from all things is necessary [C. 31.10.80] that will leave the soul empty so as to be filled with the divinity [C. Easter, 1864; 15.12.78], something which is characteristic of Master Eckhart and the other representatives of this school⁴³. Among them, MME mentions Suso especially.

4.3. *The French School*

The principal source that sustained the spirituality of the 19th century was undoubtedly the so called "French School"⁴⁴ that developed during the 17th century in France. Many authors form part of this school that many consider as such from the chronological aspect. We will name the two mentioned most often by MME.

The doctrine on the abandonment in God of St. Francis of Sales⁴⁵ is perhaps the most characteristic of this author and one of the aspects from which MME looked at Joyful Detachment. This saint designates abandonment in God as the quintessence of the spiritual life, [C. 15.12.72; 22.12.72], expressed in obedience even in little things [C. 9.8.74], and trust in His Providence [C. 25.3.81]. Through this abandonment and the indifference it leads to, the soul dies to itself when putting all its love in Jesus [C. 12.1.83]. Closely related to this trait, we must consider the prayer of the presence of God⁴⁶, which, like St. Francis of Sales, MME considers as an essential attitude for life [C. Nice 70; 23.7.76; 9.3.79; 29.8.81],

and which is accomplished through a getting rid of every thought that makes one turn in on oneself.

Another representative author of this period and who influenced MME is the Cardinal de Bérulle. She uses two terms characteristic of this author: "abasement" and "annihilation" to explain the mystery of the Incarnation and its practical consequences for the spiritual life⁴⁷. This spiritual author saw the path of perfection as an act of the will that opens the believer to the action of grace in his heart, that expresses itself in an abnegation that should be like that of the kenosis that took place in the Incarnation evoked in this sense in the Chapel of MME: "The Incarnation, Mystery of Holiness" [C. 15.12.78; id. L. VIII, 1551]. De Bérulle believes that the offering of the soul to God through detachment should be total to attain union with Jesus [C. 7.4.72].

4.4. The Carmelite School

In more than one occasion MME uses the Theresian metaphor of the Interior Castle [C. 24.1.75], and explicitly quotes paragraphs of her works to illustrate through the life and teachings of the Saint of Avila how far the creature transformed by her Creator can go [C. 12.8.83]. She encourages the Sisters to follow this path of detachment [C. 12.1.83] and of identification with Christ even in the details [2.3.83].

5. Joyful Detachment as human collaboration in the process of sanctification worked on by Grace (Slide 7)

5.1. Joyful Detachment in the spiritual doctrine of MME

Considering all that has been said up to this point, we can affirm that detachment according to MME would be the response of the person to the experience of the Goodness of God described previously, based on the faith in the infinite goodness of God [C. 19.5.78-FT 329-330]. It is the radical certainty that the person can receive everything he needs from Him to develop himself as a person and moreover, to attain his real identity not centered on self and on his complex plurality but rather referred to God in simple unity and to His Kingdom. It is therefore necessary to get rid of a centeredness on self and self-love to attain unification in the love that God wants to dwell in the human heart⁴⁸.

It is joyful because it fulfills the real end of the person: life in God. Even if in many moments that good is not perceived nor understood it must be anchored in hope. This theological virtue makes of joyful detachment a disposition that allows the person to experience any circumstance anchored in the certainty that all things turn to good [C. 19.5.78-FT 330-332]. Joyful detachment is thus turned into a means through which instead of spending time lamenting, which is useless, we are stimulated to dedicate our time to "filling ourselves with truth, with love and in working at the service of Our Lord." [C. 19.5.78-FT 330].

MME considers this attitude or spiritual means as an antidote against this great evil of her time and of ours: "that of always turning in on ourselves", a consequence of original sin because at the beginning, the person did not need to detach himself from himself to be in communion with God [C. 19.5.78-FT 329-330]. Joyful detachment is a renunciation of "all that comes from the 'I', and all that returns to it" [CE-FT 372]. It is a way of focusing on the energies for the service of the Kingdom and not lose time in selfish concerns. [C. 19.5.78-FT 329-330]. This disposition helps us to live in such a way that all our actions are directed towards God "our eternal end"⁴⁹, and that carries out the motto "God Alone" [C. 29.9.1872].⁵⁰

This element brings the joy that should characterize the Religious and the laity of the Assumption, joy in sharing the joy of the Risen Christ after having shared in the sufferings of His Passion as Mary did in her life until the joy of the Assumption⁵¹.

From this orientation even the cross can be experienced with "good humor" as a donation in love⁵².

5.2. *Actuality or actualization of this tool*

As we have been sensing throughout this presentation, the teaching on joyful detachment is very relevant today. It responds to the desire or the need of the person of our times. Let us conclude this presentation noting by way of synthesis some concrete practices of this tool of the spiritual life:

- Abandonment to the love of God is the spiritual experience that prevents this tool from becoming a wishful practice and the only condition for it to become joyful. In Jesus and in Mary we have two models of detachment, meditating and reflecting on this mystery we can learn to live it.
- Detachment is a path of integral personal growth, encompassing all the dimensions of the individual as to helping the individual not to live turned in on oneself but referred to Him who gives us being reuniting our love and our desire in the one thing necessary: the God of the Kingdom and the Kingdom of God.
- Social implications from the experience of solidarity, to live with what is necessary so that others may live with what is sufficient and the commitment to the transformation of society, a very important tool in our educative action.

"We hope that with St. Marie Eugenie, you may be clothed with Christ and unceasingly renew your courage and your hope".⁵³

Thank you!

Sr Mercedes

¹ J. MARTÍN VELASCO, *El fenómeno místico. Estudio comparado*, Trotta, Madrid 1999, 49-64.

² In some of the texts that we conserve of her diary when young MME quotes Rousseau, Montaigne or Le Bruyère. Cf. B. SESBOÛE, *Quelques réflexions sur la spiritualité de Mère Marie Eugénie Milleret*, Religieuses de l'Assomption, Paris 2004, 4-5.

³ "The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," (1*) loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. (214) He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification". VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Vatican Publications, Rome 1964, n°39. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_sp.html (21.5.09).

⁴ "The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received." LG 40.

⁵ We can point out two motives as principal causes for this neglect: "the incorrect theological understanding of the same, of the wishful character" and "the pressure of a social environment that, at least in the West, has lowered dramatically the ethical and moral standard". SANTIDAD ARZUBIALDE, "The Universal Vocation to Holiness", *Miscelánea Comillas* 58 (2000), 27-84, 27-28. The meme definition given of "saint" or of "holiness" in modern language dictionaries, support this statement because they point out the religious, heroic, determined, rare or extraordinary or 'blessed' with which these words are used in reality. It is enough to read, for example, the voice "Holy" in M. MOLINER, *Diccionario de uso del español. I-Z*, Gredos, Madrid 1998, 1029-1031; and in RAE, *Diccionario de la lengua española*, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid 2001²², 1375-1376.

⁶ "It is therefore obviously relevant to teach that all are called to holiness. One has to speak of it with insistence but without making of holiness either a commodity or an ideal that can be attained effortlessly". G. THILS, *Santidad cristiana. Compendio de teología ascética*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1968⁵, 39.

⁷ "The only path capable of getting us out of the actual crisis on trust in man passes through a rediscovery of holiness". BROTHER JOHN OF TAIZÉ, *La aventura de la santidad, fundamentos bíblicos y perspectivas actuales*, PPC, Madrid 2000, 8.

⁸ Cf. K. RAHNER, "Ancient and Present Spirituality", *Escritos de teología VII*, Taurus, Madrid 1967, 13-35.

⁹ "The mystical dimension of the Christian life, that is, the personal 'experience' (vivenciación) of the faith corresponds to the need that man has to personally exercise the faith, of making a personal faith experience so that faith may not turn into routine, cultural heritage, a merely institutional membership or an ideological affirmation of a more or less extensive catalogue of truths. [...] This experience has its center in the conversion of heart, from a life centered on oneself to a life centered in its true center which is God. That 'experience' (vivenciación) or personalization of religion has to be cultivated, cared for, lived... permit it to impregnate all the dimensions of life". J. MARTÍN VELASCO, *El fenómeno místico*, 456.

¹⁰ Combing through the texts of the *Chapter Instructions, Notes Intimes and Letters*, we are surprised by the frequent appearance of the different forms of the Word "holiness". Sanctify (95, 23, 138), Sanctified (51, 6, 74), Sanctifying (7, 1, 6), Holiness (246, 56, 113), Saint (2185, 149, 367; 1902, 164, 483), Saints (510, 36, 172; 181, 16, 217). In total, 7198 compared to 2458 equivalent forms of the word "perfection", which is used almost as synonym of holiness. MME devotes three *Instructions* on this topic ("The Incarnation, Mystery of Holiness" [C. 15.12.78], "Humility, Foundation of Holiness" [C. 13.10.89] and "Dispositions to Arrive at Holiness" [C. 9.9.90]), even if in most of them we find the exhortation to holiness. She devotes 9 *Instructions* to the deepening of and the exhortation to perfection in its different nuances.

¹¹ "In each of the 'types' of Christianity and of holiness, the same essential elements are lived but in a particular way presenting an original 'form' or a determined 'coloring'. [...] There exists a distinction between 'holiness' as such and the 'form' that it can take. [...] Said forms are captured in the determined 'spiritualities' that mark the path to holiness in a given vocation. [...] They manifest the desire to possess a doctrine of holiness that seriously takes into account – and not artificially or accidentally – the special 'form' that the different Christian virtues – and Christian behavior as a whole – take in one or the other situations of life. [...] The term 'spirituality' has been used in the sense that it was necessary to speak of Christian virtues and of the general evolution of Christian holiness no longer transposing laboriously a given 'form' of spirituality but translating the immutable substance of the Christian doctrine to the different 'forms' of holiness." G. THILS, *Santidad cristiana*, 46-48.

¹² B. GOYA, "Madurez psicológica y santidad cristiana", *Psicología y vida espiritual*, San Pablo, Madrid 2001, 169-211.

¹³ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Amará al Señor tu Dios. Psicología del encuentro con Dios*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2003.

¹⁴ From the anthropological point of view, the personal vocation or call to a given style of life in the following of Christ according to a concrete spirituality can be understood from the attraction of some specific values that will motivate the person in the response to and the fulfillment of her vocation. J.C.R. GARCÍA PAREDES, *Teología de las formas de vida cristiana 3. Perspectiva sistemático-teológica. Vocación, consagración, misión, comunión*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1996.

¹⁵ Cf. J. MARTÍN VELASCO, *El fenómeno místico*, 335-341.

¹⁶ "Lately, in a long and as intimate prayer as was possible to this poor soul, she asked God what He had to say. In the end the answer was: 'I am Goodness'" [L. VI, 1508].

¹⁷ The expression "infinite good" in reference to God, is found 5 times in her spiritual diary (N.162/01; 3v v en N. 207/01, N.228/01), 29 times in the *Instructions* to the Sisters and 5 times in her correspondence. The attribute goodness applied to God appears more than 300 times. The content of said experience with other formulae is found through all her writings.

¹⁸ For the understanding and verbalization of this experience, MME made her own, in an admirable way, the Thomistic teaching even if it is true that this expression and its development bring us back to the teachings of Denis the pseudo-Aeropagite who she probably did not read but of which the work of St. Thomas is full. Even if this expression is not found in St. Augustine, the centrality of the idea of God as love could have been taken from the Bishop of Hippo and the authors of the "French School".

¹⁹ "She (Mary) understood the perfection, infinity and sovereignty of God's being. She understood the holiness, beauty, force, power and complete perfection of God. He is beyond our conception. It is almost always by negation that we name Him" [C. 19.8.81-FT349].

²⁰ She devotes only three *Instructions* to this topic [C. 15.12.78; C. 25.3.81; C. 23.9.88], although she names or explains this mystery in many other *Instructions* and writings. The French School is what has most

influenced this topic, (Apdo. 3.4.4), and concretely Cardinal De Bérulle. It is very likely that this last author also assumed the childhood spirituality [C. 2.5.84-FT 361-362].

²¹ "we must penetrate ourselves with these thoughts because the more we understand Jesus Christ as God, the more conscious we are of what He is as man, the more His birth, His childhood, His hidden life, His public life, His teaching and His sufferings will touch us deeply." [C. 10.3.78-FT 301]. The Christology of MME does not see Jesus only as an ethical model of perfection but from the soteriological charge contained in the believed mystery of a God who assumes human nature to save it bringing it an inner dynamism that overcomes all human capacities or the free 'doing' of the person even if it collaborates with her and that tradition called grace. Besides, as we have affirmed, the person will perfect itself only in eternal life, eschatological horizon and fullness of life implicit in creation and fulfilled in redemption. Cf. G. URÍBARRI, *La singular humanidad de Jesucristo*. "It is in this mystery that all things human have been divinized and find their end." [L. VII, 1592].

²² MME explains the way of the Incarnation [C. 19.8.81-TF 348] from the Thomistic point of view of this mystery, from the dogmatic point of view.

²³ "What a gift, the Incarnation of the Word! In His holy infancy what abandonment, what despoiling, what dependence. To what a state of powerlessness God reduced Himself in order to be given to us!" [C. 2.5.84-FT 361. Id. C. 15.12.78; C. 25.3.81; C. 23.9.88].

²⁴ "Descending in this way, Jesus Christ wanted to open us to the way of holiness. [...] The first affection, then, the first love that attracted Jesus Christ to earth, was holiness. There can be no saint except in this annihilation of Our Lord in His Incarnation. There is the root of all holiness. There is the principle of renunciation of all this of the earth and of the annihilation of self to live of God, according to God, in the will of God." [C. 15.12.78]. In the *Instructions* alone we can count: "Abasement" 52 times and "Annihilation" 63 times, without counting other forms of the word. These same expressions are used by de Bérulle to explain this mystery.

²⁵ She undoubtedly receives this optimism and shares it with contemporary authors, heirs of an enlightened humanism but which counteracts the deist or atheism deviation with a realism about the human condition wounded by sin and its continuous dependence, and not only original, with God with an Augustinian style.

²⁶ The identification of the true life of the human being with the vision of God – divine knowledge, has deep biblical, patristic and scholastic roots.

²⁷ "Before the fall people saw all things in God and God in all things. But when their sight was troubled by sin, when their intelligence was darkened by ignorance, after concupiscence had become a driving force, they tended to prefer interior things and egoism." [C. 19.5.78-FT 332].

²⁸ "God is not only our Creator, our Judge: He is also our last end. Our soul was made for Him, made to possess Him forever, to be endlessly happy in the company of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to enjoy the Blessed Trinity. And each soul will do so in proportion to its capacity and merits. There you have our true destiny in Christ, who alone had the right to enter heaven but who can, and who wills to take us there too, to be with Him forever." [C. 6.8.73]

²⁹ L. VII, 1556. Id. C. 5.5.78-TF 465; C. 19.5.78-TF 477-478.

³⁰ "St. Augustine said that there were but two cities in this world: that of love of self to the point of contempt of God and that of love of God to the point of contempt of self, that is, selfishness and devotedness. There you have the whole mystery, all the principle of good and of evil in the things here below" [CE-TF 535]. Thus it is necessary to remove from ourselves and from the students the vanity and pride that arise from selfishness/egoism and that "hide themselves" in the intricacies of the human heart [CE-TF 539].

³¹ Cf. C. DOMÍNGUEZ MORANO, *Los registros del deseo. Del afecto, el amor y otras pasiones*, Desclée De Brouwer, Bilbao 2001.

³² Even if the term "narcissism" was used for the first time by SIGMUND FREUD (*On Narcissism. An Introduction*, 1914) as a personality disorder, these authors refer to it as a trend favored by our society and which they describe as an impediment to human fulfillment. Cf. C. LASCH, *La cultura del narcisismo*, Andrés Bello, Barcelona 1999; A. LOWEN, *El narcisismo. La enfermedad de nuestro tiempo*, Paidós, Barcelona 2000. The resolute determination to live it as a "separated being", with the solitude that implies and the renunciation to leave that "paternal-maternal home" that encloses us in a narcissism of death, is what makes possible the openness to a rich world of relationships, full of "unique and singular presences for each, with which desire in its different registers, finds its joy and its satisfaction". C. DOMÍNGUEZ MORANO, *Los registros del deseo*, 108.

³³ "Man was created honest, simple and good. In our desire for the glory of God, we must seek to acquire these natural virtues which serve as a foundation for the supernatural ones." [C. 26.5.78-FT 334].

³⁴ "These should be our motivations to become humble. Therein we shall find the joy and liberty which will keep our hearts open to God. He will see that we want all honor, praise and blessing for Him and nothing for ourselves or for any other creature." [C. 7.4.78-FT 309].

³⁵ "Speaking like this about union should help you to understand better the spirit that marks our Congregation and our own particular way of tending to perfection." [C. 14.12.73-FT346]

³⁶ "Let us open our hearts wide to receive these graces. Let us be wholly recollected so that He may touch the secret point of the soul where He has chosen to be heard. It was this secret point that God touched when He called you to religious life." [C. 23.6.78-FT 338]. MME took the identification of the higher part of the soul as the "place" of union with God, [C. 19.8.81-FT 348-349], from scholastic theology.

³⁷ Mary fulfilled perfectly the vocation of love. "You engage yourselves publicly to die to self-love, to pride and to a love of worldly things so that you can imitate Our Lady, the humblest, the poorest and most obedient of all creatures." [IC-FT 18].

³⁸ "When she was on earth, her life was a life of union with God and of charity towards the neighbor." [C. 19.8.81].

³⁹ "We should be closely united and attached to the life of the Blessed Virgin, which was none other than the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Following her example, we should also rise above earthly things, freeing ourselves from them by the "Sursum Corda!": we should try to remain always in this disposition. Whenever things do not go too well, when we are in difficulty or suffering, let us try to rise higher by faith and love. This is what the Assumption means for us. It draws us above all these sufferings and difficulties, all the sorrows of life, maintaining us in a state of faith, of hope, and of the love of Our Lord." [C. 14.12.73-FT343].

⁴⁰ C. 1853-II; 13.8.1876; 13.7.1879. In the *Instructions* on charity she habitually mentions St. Augustine exhorting to live the first paragraph of the Rule: "Before all else love God and love your neighbor, for these are the first commandments given to us", a phrase to which she devotes an *Instruction* [C.9.3.1890], but which she comments on many others [C. 24.2.78-FT 293]. She also underscores the practice of charity developing various details of the *Rule*, enriching it with quote from other Works of the Saint of Hippo. Love should also govern the way of exercising authority [Const. 40, 25-FT 111].

⁴¹ Her theology on the Kingdom of God is nurtured, together with the contemporary sources, by the "social doctrine" developed by St. Augustine in this work *The City of God*.

⁴² To know Jesus Christ it is necessary to meditate on His mysteries, an exhortation she also supports in the Augustinian teachings [C. 13.8.1876; 4.11.1877; 13.7.1879; 20.8.1886].

⁴³ A. DE LIBERA, *Eckart, Suso, Tauler y la divinización del hombre*, J.J. de Olañeta, Palma de Mallorca 1999, 79-97; D. DE PABLO MAROTO, *Espiritualidad de la Baja Edad Media (Siglos XIII-XV)*, 231-286.

⁴⁴ The masters and schools of spirituality of the 17th century usually gather together in what Bremond (1865-1933) baptized as the "French School", a term that is not very exact as to what it refers to as "school" since the authors do not form a homogenous group regarding method and content. And even if it is bounded by the frontiers of France and many of them knew each other, the initiators of the disciples cannot be identified nor can it follow the evolution of the same teaching. That is why some authors identify the "French School" with Berullism, or the teachings of Cardinal de Berulle. However, due to the complexity of the subject matter, we understand by "French School" in our study as the masters and schools that arose in the France of the 17th century and who possess common tone and influences: 1. an Augustinian anthropology that insists on the shallowness of the human being to better affirm the life of Christ in the Christian; 2. a living consciousness of the greatness of God known in Jesus Christ; 3. an emphasis on the action of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual life; 4. a Marian piety theologically founded; 5. an apostolic (assistance to the poor, Christian education through colleges and catechesis which stresses on a solid intellectual formation but also on the growth of virtue ...) and very vigorous missionary (external and internal) commitment; 6. a great sense of Church (concern for its shepherds and reflection of the different status of life) and 7. a concern to provide solid tools for the spiritual life to each of them (spiritual direction, retreats, talks, ways of prayer, liturgical life, devotions ...) for a spiritual life characterized by abnegation, abandonment, love that brings to adoration, etc. Cf. J. LE BRUN, "France. VI. Le grand siècle de la spiritualité française et ses lendemains", *DSp V*, 917-953; Y. KRUMENACKER, *L'école française de spiritualité*, 15-43. Este libro nos guiará en el desarrollo de este apartado.

⁴⁵ R. Devos, "Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal", *DSp VIII*, 1057-1097; A. RAVIER, *Un sage et un saint, François de Sales, Nouvelle Cité*, Paris 1985; P. SEROUET, "François de Sales", *DSp V*, 1057-1097.

⁴⁶ St. Francis of Sales affirms one should be able to reach in the spiritual life at a constant prayer, a habitual turning towards God because true prayer is vital, is a relationship of love. Even if he suggests methods, he knows that he cannot enclose himself in them. The beginner should make the effort of becoming aware of the divine presence, but when he advances in the spiritual path this presence and recollection impose themselves without personal effort; this prayer, which St. Francis of Sales calls "of simple presence", consists in being present to God, not meditating over His presence or feeling it, is a "total abandonment in God", that rises after the purgative stage and is fulfilled in holy indifference. The mystical life is a path of progress in the Light and in love until attaining union and abandonment. [C. 30.1.76; 27.5.81; 22.9.82]. Cf. FRANCISCO DE SALES, *Tratado*

del Amor de Dios, BAC, Madrid 1995, 335-357. MME describes "the Prayer of the Simple Handing Over to God" in the Chapter of 14.11.84.

⁴⁷ Cf. P. DE BÉRULLE, *Discursos y elevaciones. Discursos sobre el estado y las grandezas de Jesús. Elevación sobre la gracia de Dios en Magdalena. Escritos breves*, BAC, Madrid 2003, 23.

⁴⁸ "...the spirit of the Assumption demands total self-effacement. We must seek God alone, desiring only God and His service. We must seek only His Law and His Kingdom, His presence in other. We seek Him alone in our lives and in our relationships with others. This requires great courage, for it means that we truly go beyond self, in a way that excludes self seeking." [C. 3.2.78-FT 286. Id. C. 19.5.78-FT 329; L. VII, 1555].

⁴⁹ "Let us leave lesser and inferior things under our feet so that we can continually raise our minds and hearts towards God, busy ourselves with God, seek God, see God, talk about God and love God. Lastly let us attain Him by this holy and joyful detachment..." [C. 19.5.78-FT 333].

⁵⁰ Her spiritual diary and many of her letters to Fr. d'Alzon [L. VII, 1556; 1557], reveal the long path of conversion MME had to go through to arrive at this simplification and unification in God for which she made use of this element since her ego, to her regret, occupied much space. This confession, far from damaging our image of her and of her path to holiness, stimulates our hope to believe that the path is possible.

⁵¹ "I will continue speaking about the spirit of the Assumption because it seems to me that what I want to say today coincides with the mystery of the Resurrection. In a way, the Assumption is a kind of resurrection it is the life of Mary begun already in heaven. This shows us that our life should always have a touch of joy, even in our struggles and sacrifices. We will experience heart-breaking moments but the way in which we handle these situations should reflect more of heaven than of earth." [C. 21.4.78-FT 315-316].

⁵² "We should accept all our difficulties wholeheartedly and willingly. We must present a smiling visage to them..." [C. 19.8.81-FT 350]. "Oh! How the freedom of love makes me happy even while it renders my fidelity more serious." [L. VII, 1592].

⁵³ BENEDICT XVI, *Angelus of Sunday 3 June 2007*. Vatican Publications, Rome 2007.

C = Chapters

L = Letters

CE = Counsels on Education

FT = Foundation Texts