

**Build our Work and Teaching
on the foundation of Faith**

28th April 1889

My dear Daughters,

This week we celebrate the anniversary of the day we first came together. It was a small and fragile group. One thing that astonished me as I look back is that none of us thought of founding anything. I Certainly did not nor did Mother Therese Emmanuel nor Sr. M Augustine. Yet from that first moment we never doubted that there was a future for the work God had given us. It is true that Abbé Combalot, the one who wanted to found a work for which we were his instruments, never doubted it would be realized. His confidence was communicative.

But there is another reason I would like to consider today, a thought that should always guide our decisions our efforts and work in the future. When we met, our intention was to give ideas in conformity with the ideas and teachings of the Church and to make Christian doctrine the foundation of everything. We had all experienced the difficulties that result from an education based on worldly or anti-Catholic principles. Doubtless it was not deliberate that God's name was never mentioned nor religion made the basis of our education. However it lacked conviction. We could read any

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type of book, our teachers had widely differing beliefs and at our age it was impossible, having acquired a certain culture, not to understand the disadvantages of having been taught matters that were not always based on truth. M. Therese Emmanuel felt this is strongly as I did.

The principle we wanted as foundation of our work was to offer to our pupils only those ideas which came from Christian faith or accorded with the Church's teaching. In fact we would cease to exist and could still do so, if we proposed something different, something not based on the principles we had chosen as the foundation for our education.

You can readily understand, Sisters that all that enters the minds of our pupils should be founded on faith so that armed with this conviction, in time of danger they would find there a support which would strengthen them or bring them back to accomplish their duties as Christians. In the beginning we wanted to use the ideas and traditions of the Church and we still do. We did not propose something new, far from it. All we desired was to profit of all that was established and traditional in the Church. This is the character the ancient Orders recognized in us. We have something of their traditional spirit, we have their character, ideas and practices. This is why, a little later on, we decided to recite the Divine Office.

The Divine Office is one of the sources of our life from which we draw the spirit of the Church. I understand

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why we used to say, "It is impossible that God should not desire our work, for He surely desires for a great number of pupils an education based on the principles that come from the Faith and the Church's teachings."

It was on this that we based our confidence and Abbé Combalot, in fact, agreed with us fully. In spite of his vivid imagination and his incoherence and lack of reasonableness in his undertakings, the liveliness of his faith and his long contact with the most distinguished bishops of France had filled his mind with the ideas I have just explained, except for the Office with which he was not too concerned. When we asked Monsignor Affre if we might recite the Divine Office he objected at first. He suggested that since we belonged to the Paris diocese we should say the diocesan Office in French. I pointed out that we hoped for foundations elsewhere, (there was a question that we go to Strasbourg where he had been named bishop) and in that case we would have to use the Office of each diocese which could prove difficult. Monsignor Affre saw the validity of the objection and allowed us to have the Office of the universal Church in Latin.

He was a great bishop with no ideas contrary to the faith, though perhaps some were not wholly in accord with the universal Church. The ideas of Gallicanism had dominated his youth and prevented him from appreciating the traditions and all that was ancient in the Roman Church. He was however, a man of great intelligence and talent and met his death with courage in an admirable manner.

The bishops whose ideas had the greatest influence on us are, Mgr Gerbet, Mgr de Salinis, in whom Abbé Combalot had unlimited trust and whose ideas were very just; Cardinal Gousset, a man of tradition and of the Church above all else. Three great ideas dominated Msgr. Gousset's life: to make known and to uphold the dogma of infallibility, to spread the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, not yet defined, and to propagate the moral theology of St Alphonsus de Ligouri. He considered that many souls in our times would be saved by these ideas. After his death the dogmas of Infallibility and of the Immaculate Conception have been defined and St Alphonse has been declared a doctor of the Church. This shows how acute was Cardinal Gousset's sense of the Church. He was a true "man of the Church" from head to toe.

I remember seeing him once really angry with a preacher who had given a retreat to the priests of his diocese. He told me indignantly, "Madame, he spoke of a multitude of devotions and never mentioned the Sovereign Pontiff or Rome, the centre of the Church. I simply had to stand up and add what he had omitted. I could not support the fact that he mentioned neither the See of Peter nor the Pope." The influence of the Cardinal was good, traditional and on the lines of what we were seeking to be.

We have known other bishops with similar ideas, Mgr Gay, Mgr Pie who often advised me, and many others committed to us who helped us follow our proper path. The

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ideas of these men had great influence on us and Abbé Combalot echoed them. They were his friends and he was of their school of thought and accepted their advice. Some of them had even considered founding a work similar to ours. Mgr Gerbet even thought of an order of deaconesses as servants of the Church. This, however, was too exterior a work to link up with an interior, liturgical and monastic life.

The last time I was in Rome, I said to Cardinal Parocchi, "Our work expresses the ideas of such and such a bishop." He answered, "Ah! that was the Golden Age of the Church in France. Those bishops had both just and good ideas. I fear it is now the Iron Age in France." This might appear severe but it does not mean to say that there are not bishops of great merit in France. It is certain that at that time there was a remarkable movement led by Dom Gueranger. I had few relations with him personally, but today we are close to his monks and I congratulate myself for they have the same ideas as we have.

Finally Sisters, our best friend, Father d'Alzon who was like a Father for us, was before all a man of Roman doctrine. All his conversations and teachings were filled with the spirit of faith. What he liked in us particularly was our aim from which I ask you never to deviate.

You are numerous today, my dear daughters. Do not forget that if we were to fail in our mission God would no longer bless us. We give our pupils an education the world does not find too Catholic but it is so in truth because we

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give the pupils love and understanding of the Office and we teach them I hope, in such a way that everything in their minds is based on faith and on Catholic teaching.

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