



# *The Beehive & the Boat*

*Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel  
Two Lives in the Service of Christ*



# Marie Eugénie

A bicentenary – that is what are celebrating. All the more as it has to do with our Mothers, they to whom we owe the life of the Congregation!

In celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Anne Marie Eugénie Milleret and of Catherine Gertrude O'Neill, it is their entire lives that we wish to honour as well as their friendship in service of the foundation, of the project.

This friendship allowed them to brave the hazards that arose along the path of the newly founded Assumption. Received as a gift, it wove its way through shadow and light, steeped in a humanity that echoed with the Mystery of the Incarnation, the

foundation of the Congregation. Our celebration is an immense thanksgiving for this path of friendship and for the *"particular grace"* of each of these two women, who allowed themselves to be guided by the loving hand of God, exerting all their energies in the service of the Kingdom.

This book pays stirring homage to the fruitfulness of the charism that they shaped, putting in common the wealth of their personalities and their spiritual life, a charism that sustained them and that they have bequeathed to us.

In contemplating the multi-coloured stained-glass window of their lives, penetrated by the light of



# Thérèse Emmanuel

God, we understand how *"the friends are travel companions who help us to move forward on the path..."* In fact, right up until their death, Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel were true travel companions for the first sisters of the Congregation, helping one another in order to steer the *"boat"* or run the *"hive"*, two images for the same work.

Both of them, each in her own way, laid the Congregation's foundation upon which generations of sisters continued to build, leaving us with the responsibility of improving this legacy, of living and sharing it.

The rendering of these two faces was entrusted to three Religious of the Assumption, to write complementary chapters, each focussing on the two personalities. May my thanks, which is that of the whole Congregation, make itself felt in the enthusiasm with which we welcome this work, the fruit of the efforts of sisterly communion, performed with joy and gratitude!

May the reading of this work thus guide us on the path traced by our two *"twin"* Mothers, in the manner of a rebirth!

Sister Martine Tapsoba  
Superior General



*«As my heart enlarges,  
what a sense of God's infinite love  
is shed there at times. I feel an expansion of love –  
I feel myself becoming better,  
and this growth of the life of the heart,  
of the life of the soul...  
is an unspeakable joy.»<sup>1</sup>*

*Saint Marie Eugénie*





# God Had Great Plans for Her

« God had great plans for her (...) God had rightly chosen her for his work, and she was bound to later become our beloved Mother, and in her, the principal foundation stone.

*She possessed high intelligence, a strong character – generous, independent, proud and even a bit haughty; one felt that this so richly endowed nature would not bend except under the yoke of divine love.*

*She had received a brilliant and full education. One found in her that noble Irish enthusiasm for all that is great and beautiful. To all this, she added a simplicity that at times almost approached naiveté and which had a great deal of charm. »*

Excerpt from the memoir of Marie Thérèse <sup>2</sup>

It was in a lovely home in Limerick, an Irish town located at the mouth of the River Shannon, that Kate O'Neill came into this world on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1817, with a twin who died shortly afterwards.

Among her gifts at birth were the fruits of the family legacy: determination, faith and love for the poor. In fact, the O'Neill family coat of arms recalled the courage of an ancestor who, according to legend, had the idea of cutting off his right hand and throwing it ahead of himself in order to be the first to touch the

■ 1 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 154/01, 1837

■ 2 Marie Thérèse (Joséphine de Commarque), Memoir, 1874 – M01 – I No. 1, p.6



himself alone with three young children, and he took his two daughters, Kate and Marianne, to a convent in York which received all the young daughters of the nobility in the region.

Kate found the austere rules of the Bar Convent to be inspiring for her faith, and she joined the “*fellowship of humility*”. It was in York that she received her First Communion, on Christmas Eve in 1827, and where she felt the beginnings of the call to religious life. Fascinated by holiness and the idea of “*purity*”, she could not imagine another way of living for God. She had but one desire: to offer him her life, to work for him.

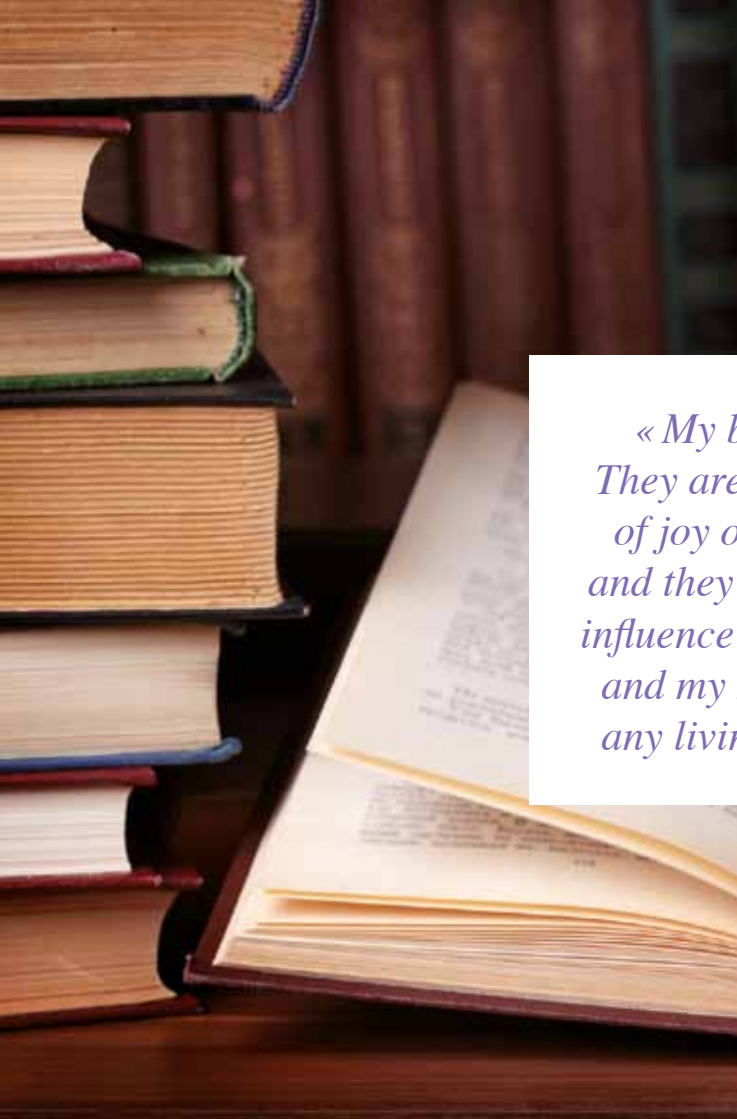
At 13 years of age, she fell ill, and a nun suggested that she should lose no time in consecrating the years that remained to her. As for Kate, she did not at all foresee an imminent death: “*She wanted me to die, but I felt very much that I wanted to live and that I was to work for God.*”

land of Ireland, which allowed him to become king. Kate's father, Alan Francis, and her mother, Emily Howly, expressed their faith in their own ways. Mr O'Neill, who loved luxury but recited the rosary every day, would declare the following at the news of his ruin: “*The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*”<sup>3</sup>

As for Kate's mother, she expressed her devotion through her love for the poor. On the eve of her death, when she had already given alms several times, she wanted someone to give something to a beggar who had appeared. To her sister, who thought that she gave too much, she replied: “*Charity, Marguerite, charity...*” These were her last words. She died a few moments later. Kate was only seven years old, when Mr O'Neill found

■ 3 Cf. Job 1:21





«My books ...  
They are my world  
of joy or sorrow,  
and they have more  
influence on my soul  
and my mind than  
any living being.»

Another day, she was slightly injured, and her old servant reassured her, saying that she would not die. Kate was delighted, for she would have been sad to think that she should die without having done anything for God. But Mr O'Neill was concerned about the health of his daughters because of the austerity of the Bar Convent, and in

1834, he sent them to New Hall. There, "freedom" was the key word, expanding Kate's heart as she found her joy in the solemnity of the Mass and the nobility of their studies, features that she would introduce into the way of life of the Religious of the Assumption. Her desire for a spiritual life became stronger; a thousand questions passed through her mind and tested her faith. She only regretted not being encouraged by her confessor, a "candle snuffer", as she said.

In response to her questions, he was content to reply: 'Let it be ... Don't think about it anymore.' That was not enough to slow Kate's inner

quest. She would have to leave New Hall aged 17 because of an illness, but she retained a great love for monastic life and her taste for the liturgy which, together with her studies, shaped her mind and heart.

Marianne had left New Hall several months before Kate. Together, they rediscovered worldly life near their father and their family, enjoying the simple and frank hospitality characteristic of Ireland. Kate was lovely and intelligent, and her father owned a beautiful estate. She was courted, but she did not lose sight of her desire to become a nun. She wondered whether the world was indeed nothing more than "a soap bubble, hollow and empty", where "vanity, sin, passion and strife" reigned; and whether it was not utopian to imagine that cloistered life was a refuge of peace and tranquillity.<sup>4</sup>

She perceived that communal life must have its very difficult sides, like – as she said – little insect bites from which one would have to distance oneself. Judging a happy life in the world to be nothing more than a fleeting pleasure and guessing that human affection would never suffice to fulfil her desire to love, she concluded:

*"Is it not much better to give this affection to God than to some creature who could not satisfy, and to devote my little life to him?"* Yet she questioned her own ability to leave the worldly spirit behind and enter into that of God: *"This continual subjugation of one's will and mind, this separation from all secular topics of interest – shall I be able to submit to it?"* She was afraid of losing her freedom through entering the convent. In short, she asked herself every question that those who feel called to God observe arising within their souls.

In worldly life, Kate in truth found only blandness and tedium. Her radical character, enamoured of holiness, was not content with the insignificance of society life. She experienced a certain solitude, which did not bother her, for in being able to dispense with human affections, she found refuge in her books: *"I am wholly prepared to make the pilgrimage of life without friends dearer and closer than my books. They are my world of joy and sorrow, and they have more influence on my soul and mind than any living being."*<sup>5</sup>

Kate was motivated by an immense thirst for learning; reading expanded her mind and nourished her thinking. It was actually one of these

■ 4 The work of Sister Claire Emmanuel, handwritten notebooks (biography of Thérèse Emmanuel up to the founding of Richmond – 0'NG2 – a), letter from 10<sup>th</sup> November 1836.  
■ 5 Ibidem





readings, by Mme. de Genlis, which gave her the idea of going to France to learn the French language and so enlarge her cultural and friendship circle. She convinced her father to let her leave with Marianne and began searching for a place that could accommodate them. Having been refused by the sisters of Sacré Cœur, the young girls were taken on as boarders at Abbaye-aux-Bois, where Mme. Récamier resided and Mr. de Chateaubriand often visited. And so, they left in January of 1837, accompanied by Modeste, their faithful servant. However, their opportunities for practising French were limited to occasional visits from the mother superior and excursions to Paris with the extern sister.

At the end of the year, they moved into a small flat outside the convent, which allowed them leave as they pleased – accompanied by Modeste, of course – and to stay out until midnight! But for all that, Kate never yielded to the temptation of a frivolous life. She attended Mass every day and remained impressed by the liturgy that held such a deep attraction for her. Having never abandoned the idea of religious life, she urgently asked God to help her find the convent that she sought and to overcome the obstacles tied to her excessive affection for her sister Marianne.

## The Power of Love

*« There is within her a power that surpasses all others, that of love (...) what one admires most in her is a heart full of tenderness, of goodness and of sensitivity. The power of intelligence is very rare in a woman; she grasps the most difficult questions with the greatest speed, and she interprets and explains them in the clearest and most distinct manner. She understands business like the most capable businessman. But her most splendid gift is for all that pertains to the things of God, for all that is part of convent life and that has to do with the spiritual order. »*

Excerpt from the memoir of Marie Thérèse<sup>6</sup>

Anne Eugénie Milleret, the daughter of a wealthy banker from Lorraine, was born several months after Kate O'Neill on 26th August 1817, in a comfortable middle-class home on Rue du Haut-Poirier in Metz, France.



■ 6 Marie Thérèse (Joséphine de Commarque), *Memoir*, 1874, M01 / No. 1

Three brothers, Eugène (14), Charles (4) and Louis (2), bent over her cradle. Elisabeth would be born a few years later. The family's life was divided between their home in Metz and Preisch Castle, located forty kilometres from the town on the border of France, Luxembourg and Germany. The windows of the castle opened onto several frontiers, and the surrounding natural expanses impressed upon the little girl's mind a love of wide-open spaces, of which she would say: *"they create more vigorous natures"*.<sup>7</sup>



in accordance with the passion that motivates the depths of the soul.

Revisiting her childhood, she wrote in a letter to Father Lacordaire: *"I was raised in a non-believing family who belonged to the liberal opposition of the Restoration. Even so, my mother wanted me to be Christian..."*<sup>8</sup> An energetic woman of character who did not like demonstrations of affection, Mme. Milleret imparted to her daughter a sense of 'renunciation', of duty. It was she who attended to her daughter's studies, Anne Eugénie having been kept home to study because of typhoid. Her mother taught her that the work of the mind must touch the heart, the will, and the character,

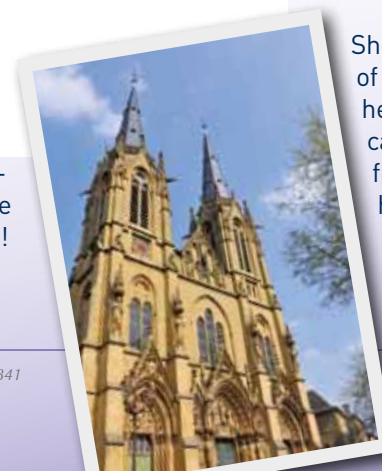
Thus, freedom, contact with nature and the love of beauty were as important for Mme. Milleret as the accumulation of knowledge. This vigorous education which was still sensitive to individual pace, respecting the stages related to age, would later lead Marie Eugénie to say that *"children were made to wither because of the desire to create little phoenixes of knowledge at the age of eight: the mind loses thereby, and moral strength is weakened."*<sup>9</sup>

The development of character seemed to Marie Eugénie *"more Christian than many completely religious educations"*.<sup>10</sup>

Ernestine Pruneau, her cousin, said of her that she had *"a straightforward and cheerful nature"*, with *"great depth of reason for her age and exquisite tact"*.<sup>11</sup> From her childhood memories, Ernestine drew minor examples illustrating Anne Eugénie's uprightness. One day, when they were strolling at the fairground, Anne Eugénie pretended not to like a present that a friend of the family wanted to give her, simply so as not to abuse his generosity. Ernestine also recalled the day that Anne Eugénie's father was named the deputy for Moselle: the house resounded with compliments; but the young girl, though happy, remained calm and self-contained. It didn't go to her head, and she continued quietly playing her children's games!

*An indissoluble bond of love was born.*

From her mother, Anne Eugénie also learned about caring for the poor and engaging with them. This experience complemented the conversations that the young girl sometimes heard in her father's parlour, conversations which opened her mind to political and social questions that would later find their place in the definition of the Assumption's educational mission. It was on this path where, according to her words, *"Christ was for nothing"* that Anne Eugénie received her First Communion on Christmas Day in 1829, *"alone"*, *"without the usual preparations"*;<sup>12</sup> but this moment was a step of grace for her faith.



She grasped the immensity of God and already let herself be grasped by him, called to distance herself from all that still fulfilled her. While looking for her mother as she returned from Communion, she heard an inner voice:

■ 7 Cf. Etudes d'archives No. 5, an educational project of the 19<sup>th</sup> century  
■ 8 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Lacordaire, No. 1501, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1841

■ 9 Cf. Etudes d'archives No. 5, an educational project of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

■ 10 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Lacordaire, No. 1501, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1841  
■ 11 Cf. Partage Auteuil No. 15  
■ 12 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 178/01



*"You will lose your mother, but I will be more than a mother to you. The day will come when you will forsake all that you love to glorify me and serve this Church that you know not."* An indissoluble bond of love was born.

The young girl hardly thought that she would experience such disruption and separation so much earlier than anticipated. In 1830, her father was ruined, a victim of the political and financial instability of the times. Ernestine recalled that during this period Anne Eugénie *'matured as a result of misfortune but remained good, calm and resigned'*. She remembered her insisting on

preparing a snack for her with jam stored in the only cupboard not yet under seal at Preisch.

The estate was sold, and Mr. and Mme. Milleret separated. Anne Eugénie went to Paris with her mother but was forced to leave her brother Louis, her faithful playmate and friend.

In 1837, she wrote to Father Combalot that these tribulations had swept over her *"like the wind across grass"*.<sup>13</sup>

Mme. Milleret had died in 1832, a victim of the cholera epidemic that ravaged Paris and the whole of France. Anne Eugénie said that it was then that she *"truly began to suffer..."* The days passed, seemingly empty and pointless.<sup>14</sup> It was the beginning of a long quest.

*« When we heard  
the Beatitudes of humility,  
poverty and suffering  
for the first time,  
we were astonished.  
Deep inside, we felt our hearts  
surge with fear, yet also  
with fascination.  
These words amazed us,  
though we did not understand  
them very well. We felt that they  
contradicted our whole nature  
but that they also elevated us... »*

*Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No.152/01*

Now accepted into the home of Mme. Doulcet, the wife of the Receiver General of Châlons, Anne Eugénie understood that nothing could satisfy the dreams of her heart or her need for affection. She experienced ennui and a distaste for life, for the futile flight into society: *"I am trying to submit to this joyful fatalism that takes things as they come, without dreaming of anything but laughing or making others laugh while forgetting the past and defying the future. Sometimes I become intoxicated by this distressing drunkenness..."*<sup>15</sup>

Courted and admired for her quick wit, she nevertheless remained alone in the world, certain that those who sang her praises today would completely forget her tomorrow. She also asked questions about the foundations of the Christian faith, which she saw as the only means of choosing to do good.<sup>16</sup>

She sought the creative word of God that was lost to the mind and heart of humanity, the word that Christ came to restate in his Incarnation.<sup>17</sup> In the call of the Gospels she heard a wonderful appeal to a consistency of life that must lead one to make choices, to speak and act in a different manner to those who do not believe.

■ 13 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No.3, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1837

■ 14 Ibidem

■ 15 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No.151/01

■ 16 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No.152/01

■ 17 Ibidem





Sensing her discomfort in society, her father suggested that she go to live with Mme. Foulon, a devout cousin. Anne Eugénie said of her and her friends: *"They bore me and seem so narrow... That was perhaps my greatest danger."* The young woman rejected the faith that they seemed to embody, a faith that would never be more than a veneer, which was not in harmony with their understanding nor would ever lead to practical results in the life of the believer – in short, that would never fight for anything of significance. During Lent in 1836, in the midst of this struggle, Anne Eugénie went to Notre Dame in Paris to hear Father Lacordaire preach.

*She placed her trust  
in God, who alone  
"loved, sought,  
redeemed and  
urged her on."*



From then on, her faith would never waver again. But one question tormented her after that: how could she give her energies to God? How could she take part in the coming of Christ's Kingdom on earth? She imagined that convent life would be a safe path for her, one that would prevent her from falling into the world's traps, but she avoided the illusion that perfection was easy to attain. When preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, she relied on God, who alone had *"loved, sought, redeemed and urged her on..."*<sup>19</sup>

There, during a long wait, she presented her questions and doubts to God. The priest's words came in response to her yearnings and gave her a complete understanding. They reawoke in her a sense of duty and the good, bestowing a new generosity upon her: *"I was truly converted"*, she said.<sup>18</sup>

■ 18 Cf. Marie Eugénie, *Letter to Father Lacordaire*, No. 1501, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1841

■ 19 Cf. Marie Eugénie, *Notes Intimes*, No.153/01



# Paths Meet Through the Emerging Work

« The compensation that allowed us to bear all was the great affection that united us and the affection we all had for the ideas of the emerging work... »

Excerpt from notes dictated by Marie Eugénie<sup>20</sup>

Thus was woven the astonishing fabric of the Assumption's beginnings. During Lent in 1839, Kate O'Neill, whom we last saw at the Abbaye-aux-Bois with Marianne and Modeste, was following the preaching of a certain Father Combalot at Saint Sulpice. At first, he seemed overly enthusiastic and exaggerated to her. As she was seeking a sufficiently broad-minded confessor who would take her desire for convent life seriously, she was reassured by the preacher's originality; and so she went to him one morning to make her confession. After asking whether she was married, the priest invited her to his home that same afternoon, whereupon he categorically stated: *"God wants you, and you must become a nun (...) God wants you in a work that I must found."*

■ 20 Notes dictated by Our Mother Foundress about Thérèse Emmanuel, No.1 (O'NI a)

Faced with such an assertion, everything within her resisted. She expressed her objections, as sensible as they were obvious, to Father Combalot: *"You don't know me, so you cannot judge. You need subordinates for your work – you have no one to accompany Mlle. Eugénie..."*

*"No one to accompany Mlle. Eugénie?"* Then this one had travelled a long way as well. Indeed, Anne Eugénie, whom Father Combalot now usually addressed as *"Mlle Eugénie"*, had approached him in Saint Eustache during Lent in 1837. She, too, had not been immediately captivated by his preaching, but prompted by God, she went to speak to him. After a difficult first meeting, he became her confessor and told her about his plan to establish an order, founded on a strong, contemplative life, which would implement an educational project for girls and young women, aiming to transform society through the values of the Gospel.

Anne Eugénie desired to give her life to Christ and to serve the Church, but she did not see herself as a foundress. She cited her lack of experience, her youth, her ignorance of convent life: *"You believed I was capable of belonging to God, of serving him as a virgin, and you spoke of an educational institution. I know these are great things, but this is not what I feel called to do."*<sup>21</sup>

« I can do nothing in half-measures; I will live a life of faith by faith... »

Marie Eugénie  
Notes Intimes, No.161/06

Father Combalot pursued her to the point where she wanted to end the relationship. A real inner conflict took place within her, bringing her little by little to understand that *"God was leading her with special care."*<sup>22</sup> Not believing in chance, she saw these unforeseen circumstances as the sign of God's benevolence. Anne Eugénie's conflict ended on the day of

her Confirmation, the Sunday after Easter: *"My vocation was settled. For me, my Confirmation opened the door to a new life."*

■ 21 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes n°154/05

■ 22 Marie Eugénie, Notes intimes, No.159/01



« *The Holy Spirit struggles with me like an eagle, and sometimes the entire power of my soul is turned upside down (...) I feel broken, annihilated, quivering, trembling like a leaf; but if I become one with the will of God, if as his servant I place my whole self at his disposal, willing to do what he desires (...) then I immediately find peace, prayer. All things become quiet, easy, and nothing makes me afraid.* »

Marie Eugénie  
Notes Intimes, No. 154/04



In July, she wrote to Father Combalot: *"Our Lord has made your work very attractive to me. I will willingly endure much in order to completely devote myself to it, assuming it goes ahead..."*<sup>23</sup> After a summer visit to Lorraine, where she was able to ascertain her family's resistance to the idea, she felt that she should follow her path despite everything. In November 1837, she retired to a life with the Benedictines of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris, where she could read and study to her heart's content. She even considered the possibility of bringing the small core of founders, which did not yet exist!<sup>24</sup>

In August 1838, when she finally obtained her father's permission, she joined the Convent of the Visitation in La Côte Saint André. There, she continued her studies, learned the basics of convent life, and prepared herself in secret, certain that God was leading her to become the cornerstone of the Religious of the Assumption.

■ 23 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 3, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1837  
■ 24 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 14, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1837

At the heart of the perpetual conflict, to which both her correspondence with Father Combalot between 1837 and 1839 and her personal notes bear witness,<sup>25</sup> was the certainty that she was deeply loved by God. This gave her the strength to move forward: *"How could I possibly worry about anything and not instead have great confidence, as God always comes to my aid with a miracle?"*<sup>26</sup>

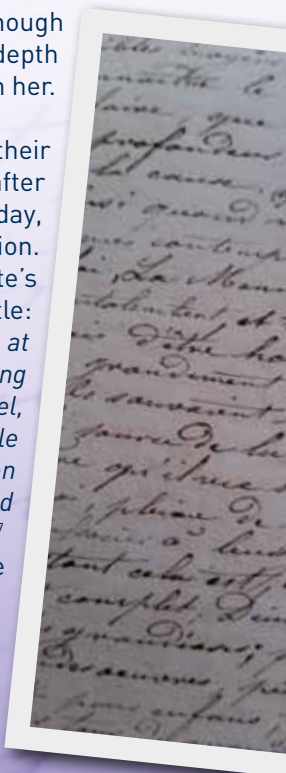
It was at this time that Father Combalot first met Kate, whom we last saw in his office. He forcefully told her: *"My daughter, you have indeed gone back and forth, but it is the will of God, and you must fulfil it. Stop making objections. It shall be."* Kate came back to see him despite Marianne's outbursts, now both sad and furious at the picture that was emerging of her sister's vocation. And in spite of her own coolness towards a venture that had not yet begun, Kate agreed to meet "Mlle. Eugénie" upon her return from the Convent of the Visitation in April 1839: *"I saw her for the first time in the Carmelite Church, at the foot of the altar of the Blessed Virgin. It was there that Father Combalot arranged for us to meet – Our Mother, Sister Marie Augustine and I – before he had even introduced us to each other."* The first meeting was wordless, and it

■ 25 Cf. Foundation Documents II  
■ 26 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 161/01

was followed by a second, where it was impossible to talk about the work because of Marianne's presence. But these two brief moments were enough for Kate, who was struck by Eugénie's depth and the inspiration that emanated from her.

Anastasie Bévier and Eugénie began their communal life on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1839, after a short retreat. Kate joined them twice a day, for Latin lessons and religious instruction. Conversation was limited, and Kate's independence frightened Eugénie a little: *"When Kate O'Neill first came to see me at Rue Férou, her proud, handsome bearing frightened me. She had the face of an angel, but an angel who only needed a little prodding to become a rebel angel. When we began to be close in Meudon, I found her soul to be as proud as her outside."*<sup>27</sup> For her part, Kate found Eugénie cold and reserved: *"In the beginning, I was afraid of you, but since then I have come to love you so much."*<sup>28</sup>

■ 27 Notes dictated from Our Mother Foundress about Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1 (0'NI a)  
■ 28 Work of Claire Emmanuel, handwritten notes (biography of Thérèse Emmanuel up until the foundation of Richmond – 0'NG2 – a)



At that time, Eugénie was feeling the heavy responsibility of the incipient work weighing down her poorly prepared shoulders. She spent long hours in prayer at Saint Sulpice.

During the summer of 1839, with no clear idea of what would become of the new community, the three young women, whom we will meet again in the next chapter, were reunited: Anne Eugénie Milleret, Anastasie Bévier and Kate O'Neill.

They withdrew to pray the Divine Office in private and to escape the watchful eye of Modeste, the maid of the two Irish young women. In the process, they discovered each other: *“With this greater closeness than we had at Meudon, I came to know our dear Mother much better; and knowing her better, I became deeply devoted to her. She had all the qualities needed in a foundress, in particular, wisdom and stability.”*<sup>29</sup>

The future was uncertain, but the eyes of the young women were fixed *“entirely on Jesus Christ and the expansion of His Kingdom”*,<sup>30</sup> as Mother Marie Eugénie would write to Father Lacordaire several years later.

■ 29 Thérèse Emmanuel, Notes dictated to Mother Madeleine of Jesus (O'NI a)

■ 30 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Lacordaire, No. 1502, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1842



*“She and I have more differences than things in common...”*<sup>31</sup> So said Marie Eugénie when writing to Father d’Alzon about Thérèse Emmanuel in 1842. But the stories of the two women’s childhoods and their callings only serve to emphasize their commonalities, in spite of all that could divide them. If one was intimate with the Christian faith, the other could seem removed from it. Yet their insatiable quest, their attraction to the Absolute, made them undeniably close – two hearts that a worldly life could never fulfil, two great minds. Kate brought with her, as a gift to the new project, her love of the liturgy and convent life. Eugénie thrilled at the idea of transforming society through the values of the Gospel and made rapid progress with the education received from her mother, an education that would help her to articulate the Assumption’s educational plan. She was seized by the love of God and wanted to let its waves pass through her hands: *“When I found love after finding my faith, all things paled beside it. I wanted everything to fall silent...”*<sup>32</sup> With two voices and with every sister who joined them, they would from then onwards continue to weave the meticulous tapestry that would endure throughout the ages.

■ 31 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1574, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1843

■ 32 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No.161/03



*«I desired with an ever increasing ardour,  
that it would please God to found  
in his Church religious orders.... to give  
to young people... a character which is stronger,  
larger, more intelligent and more Christian  
in one sense, and above all more noble  
and more free in another sense.»<sup>33</sup>*

Saint Marie Eugénie

# The spirit of the beginnings

We have already encountered the first sisters who responded with remarkable passion to the call to give themselves entirely to Christ. The story of the foundation and the early foundations of the Religious of the Assumption is above all a story of courageous love, of brave young women persevering through the many trials which came their way, sustained and guided by their relationship with Christ and their support of one another as they lived, prayed and worked together in community.

*"We began the foundation in a poor little apartment, then in rented houses. We were only a few young women without a place in the world. God has given us convents, gardens, boarding schools, chapels... All comes from Him." "Who saw this in the beginning? Who knew that we would have the Divine Office and the Blessed Sacrament exposed on our altars? Who foresaw these things? Our Lord alone knew."*<sup>34</sup>

Marie Eugénie's account of the foundation of the Religious of the Assumption captured the hearts and imagination of the sisters she was addressing forty-five years later in 1884. Picture the sisters, gathered round their foundress as she shared her memories of those early years, marvelling at all that God had brought into being from such humble beginnings. And just as they clung attentively to each word of Marie Eugénie's reminiscences, shared in her gratitude and were inspired by her faith-filled words, we too are invited to share in this act of remembering. Through their story, we have the privilege of encountering Christ who called, led and supported the first sisters.

*"In our work all comes from Jesus Christ, all belongs to Jesus Christ, all must be for Jesus Christ"* Marie Eugénie declares with passion. In this Chapter of 1884 Marie Eugénie emphasises that Christ Himself is the « why » and the « how » of the Religious of the Assumption, their source and goal.

It was Jesus himself who drew the sisters "from far and near", "by his irresistible attraction, to his service."

He called a great variety of sisters, with many different, sometimes clashing, personalities, and while "all contributed something according to their particular ability", the most important thing was that "they were asked to give themselves without reserve to a plan which unfolded into the unknown", which, as we have already seen, would involve many struggles.

The start of the Congregation could not have been more hidden and humble.

When Eugénie and Anastasia began living together on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1839, at that time the Feast of St Catherine of Siena, it was in a small flat in Paris, at 15 rue Férou, near Saint Sulpice. Their days were ordered around a timetable

of prayer, silence and study, under the guidance of Father Combalot who was eagerly pursuing his project of founding a religious Congregation of women dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption and working for the regeneration of society through the education of children and young women.

*This was the prayer of Marie Eugénie even before the foundation:*

*« Since I placed everything into his hands, I have felt a peace, so profound, so calm, so gentle... »*

*Marie Eugénie  
Notes Intimes n°154/01*



■ 33 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father. d'Alzon, No. 1627, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1844

■ 34 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1884



# The First Sisters

Although not the first young woman Father Combalot persuaded to join Eugénie, Anastasia was the first to concretely respond to his call. She wanted to enter a religious congregation, and being an orphan, she was freer than the others to do so. She recounts how following a profound spiritual experience whilst walking in Paris she was able to believe absolutely in Christ.

As a fruit of this new-found faith, she decided to dedicate herself to Christian education. “*You will learn Latin, you will read of all these*”, Father Combalot said to her, showing her his library. She replied, “*I am yours.*”<sup>35</sup> As she went to confession in the chapel of the Carmelites, Father Combalot had spoken to her of his project and invited her to visit him. Compelled by his words, she was easily persuaded to join Eugénie.

In the future congregation, she could both study to her heart’s content and give herself entirely, sharing her faith and learning.

A handful of other women were expected to join them in the following months and after a few days a third member of the early community arrived, Joséphine Néron, a childhood friend of Eugénie’s. Although Joséphine’s ill-health led to her leaving after a short time, she enabled there to be a community of three from practically the start of the Congregation. As we have seen, at this time Kate and her sister Marianne joined the little community daily for Father Combalot’s classes but they were not living in the community.

From the earliest times, the spirit full of humour of Anastasia lightened the atmosphere; this was one of her great qualities. However, this did not prevent, in the months and years to come, Eugénie finding Anastasia, who was to become

Sister Marie Augustine, a real struggle to live with, as she shared with Father d’Alzon “*whatever I do, all her spirit is a nightmare for me.*”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the strong, independent, highly gifted Kate wasn’t someone Eugénie instantly warmed to either. Far from an idyllic gathering of shared friends, the first sisters had to work very hard to create community, and especially to strive to maintain a family spirit, the “*one mind and one heart intent on God*” of the Rule of St Augustine, which they were to adopt.<sup>37</sup>

After three months in the little apartment on rue Férou, the community moved for the summer to a rented house in Meudon, in the countryside in south west Paris. Here they were joined by Kate and Marianne, and later by Joséphine de Commarque, the future Sister Marie Thérèse.

«*I felt that Providence was holding me by the hand and leading me.*»


Marie Eugénie  
Notes from Sister Marie Thérèse, *Origines I*

■ 35 *Les Origines de l’Assomption I* (Ed. 1898), p. 237

■ 36 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, no. 1610, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1844

■ 37 Rule of Saint Augustine, 1.2





*«I am already so  
attached to her that  
I can only think that  
she likewise has some  
affection for me.»*

*Saint Marie Eugénie*

We have seen the methods used by Father Combalot to bring Eugénie and Kate to the new community, Joséphine's call was similarly striking. On hearing that the young woman was wanting to join Carmel and that her health was proving an obstacle, Father Combalot urged her to join the new Congregation, which he was speaking of with such acclaim that Joséphine was assured that there were many sisters, "perhaps 2,000." However, the seeds of her vocation had been sown and even when finding out that so far the only candidate for this great work was Eugénie, she had an interior conviction that this was indeed where God was calling her.

It was a particular joy for Eugénie that Joséphine, the first sister to share her hopes and dreams for the Assumption by mail, before even the foundation, had finally joined them.

At the moment of her arrival, the presence of Marianne was already a cause of concern. Marianne was still so attached to her younger sister that she couldn't imagine being separated from her.

When Kate went to join the sisters, she decided that she would as well; if this was the only way to prevent her being separated from her beloved sister, so be it! While having a very generous heart, life in the Assumption clearly wasn't for Marianne; she was extremely bored and prone to temperamental outbursts. In an attempt to alleviate the monotony of life she would frequently travel back and forth between Meudon and Paris.

It is from these early days in Meudon that the relationship between Eugénie and Kate was built. While Eugénie wasn't initially at ease with Kate's pride, her desire for rational explanations and seeming aloofness, with time they grew to understand one another better, and to learn to trust and appreciate one another's gifts. Writing to Father Combalot, Eugénie relates:

*"I like Kate very much since she so generously gives herself to God; I feel that our communal life makes immediately a connection which is stronger than all human sentiments."*<sup>38</sup>

*"I am already so attached to her that I can only think that she likewise has some affection for me."*<sup>39</sup>

■ 38 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot no. 90, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1839

■ 39 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot no. 96, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1839



# *Their sole desire* *Jesus Christ and the extension of his kingdom*

The early days of the blossoming community involved a series of moves. After the summer in Meudon, they had the joy of moving into a larger house in central Paris, at 108 rue de Vaugirard, with room for a chapel where mass could be celebrated daily and the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Poor as they were, they did all they could to make the chapel as beautiful as possible, including attaching bits of different coloured paper to a window to give the impression of stained glass.

*« It is in this tabernacle that  
on 9th November 1839  
Our Lord came to take possession  
of His Assumption. He didn't scorn this poor  
dwelling, only regarding the love  
with which our mothers offered it to him.  
Instaurare omnia in Christo. »*



November 9<sup>th</sup> is still celebrated today by the Religious of the Assumption as the day on which the first mass was said in this little chapel at Rue Vaugirard. From this moment their names in religion, which would be accompanied by a mystery, began to be used: Eugénie became Sister Marie Eugénie of Jesus; Kate, Sister Thérèse Emmanuel of the Mother of God; Anastasia, Sister Marie Augustine of Saint Paul and Joséphine, Sister Marie Thérèse of the Incarnation. It must have seemed that religious life had really begun! We can only imagine their deep joy and profound fervour.

A few weeks later, with the start of Advent, following an idea of Father Combalot, the sisters replaced the Office of the Virgin Mary by the Roman breviary, which quickly became a mainstay of their lives. In the Introduction to the Constitutions, Father Combalot presents this as a “masterpiece of the Catholic liturgy”<sup>40</sup>. The initial plan was to use the full prayer of the Church during Advent but they were so attracted to it that they insisted on continuing afterwards. It is moving to read in the first breviary of Marie Eugénie, in the handwriting of another sister,

that in these early times, the breviaries of the sisters, bought second hand from the sellers by the riverside, were of different editions, indicating both the practical difficulties they would have had to pray together and their poverty.

*« If you are faithful, Jesus Christ  
in the Blessed Sacrament will  
soon make you know what is the  
mystery you must follow. ...  
It doesn't matter by which  
mystery Our Lord attracts you;  
what is very important is that you  
live the interior life in one  
or other of these mysteries. »*

*Marie Eugénie  
Chapter Instruction, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1855*

■ 40 Father Combalot, Introduction to the Constitutions, Foundation Texts 1 (English translation) p.39 (Ed. 1991) 1839-1840

# *Trusting in God with joyful detachment*

The young women, all from fairly well-off backgrounds and unused to household tasks, embraced their new-found poverty. As Thérèse Emmanuel relates:

« As we were not rich we had to economise, we had to pay the rent, provide necessities for the chapel, clothe and feed ourselves. We had to be careful of everything, our books, our clothes, our bits of furniture, just like the real poor, for we had only the small incomes of young girls on which to live. »<sup>41</sup>

While the others rejoiced in the poverty, despite her valiant efforts to conform to the way of life, it was too much for Marianne. Thérèse Emmanuel describes how it was a real suffering for her and how “every day she wept and begged me to leave and return with her to our own country.”<sup>42</sup> Eventually, after a few months and much fervent prayer by the community, Marianne decided to leave.

Thérèse Emmanuel was now free to embrace the way of life without daily concern for the well-being of her sister.

In their poverty, the new community were quickly blessed with more members, first Henriette Halez (Sister Marie Joséphe) and then Constance St Julien (Sister Marie Gonzague), followed before long by the first two lay sisters, from Béarn in the Pyrenees. Sister Marie Catherine and Sister Anne Marie participated in their own way in the mission of education ; their practical skills added greatly to the complementarity of gifts shared and received.

Although they had already left their worldly clothes in January 1840, on 14<sup>th</sup> August, the first five sisters received the religious habit, a moment of immense joy. However, before they were to make their profession a year later, the community faced a serious crisis.



Father Combalot, never the most consistent of advisors, had been becoming increasingly unreasonable and authoritarian. There was a disagreement about the presentation of the Constitutions: Father Combalot wanted to send them directly to Rome, without going through the Archbishop of Paris, which Marie Eugénie found inconceivable. Displeased, Father Combalot assembled all the community apart from Marie Eugénie and announced that they were to move to Brittany without her. At this point Thérèse Emmanuel assumed leadership of the group, speaking firmly on their behalf, insisting that they would leave neither Marie Eugénie nor Paris.

Father Combalot abruptly left the community, asked that his books be returned to him, and renounced all links with them. The next day, he refused to see Marie Thérèse and Thérèse Emmanuel. However, before temporarily leaving Paris, he wrote a beautiful letter to the Archbishop of Paris, recommending the community to him, insisting humbly on the beauty and the worthiness of the new community and on his own limitations.

■ 41 From the notes of Thérèse Emmanuel, *Origines I* (Ed. 1898) pp. 331-332

■ 42 *Les Origines de l'Assomption I* (Ed. 1898) p. 326



He concluded with these words: *"I kneel before you, asking that you give this work the lasting and paternal help which it needs to become established."*<sup>43</sup> As for Marie Eugénie, she suffered from this *"absolute separation"*, feeling like she was in a *"foundation without a founder"*<sup>44</sup>, searching what she could have done to avoid this, and being consoled by *"the gentleness and moderation in which she had remained throughout these final scenes"*. She remembered *"I tried so hard to hold myself together during the final episodes, interiorly and exteriorly united to the attitude of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, that Father Combalot himself said to me the day before the last that I could not have been better."*<sup>45</sup>

The young community had faced its first major hurdle, and thanks to their unity of spirit and Thérèse Emmanuel's unequivocal backing of Marie Eugénie, they survived it.

A few months later on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1841, the first three sisters made vows of religious profession. After all that they had been through in recent months, the retreat preparing for this day and the profession itself must have been a time of immense consolation and confirmation of their

vocation. Although the vows were temporary, for two years, in their hearts they were for life, and they received with deep emotion a gold ring, symbolising their commitment. Each was engraved with a phrase from Scripture or the Church's tradition that they had discerned was God's special *'word'* to them for their life ahead.

The *'words'* were as different as the sisters themselves: Marie Eugénie took *"Lord, you know that I love you"* (John 21:17); Thérèse Emmanuel *"Holy, Holy, Holy"* and Marie Augustine *"My God and my all."*

In March 1842 the sisters moved yet again, this time to the Impasse des Vignes, in the Latin Quarter of Paris, where they were able to start their first boarding school. Yet this time of expansion and realisation of their mission as educators was marked by a great sadness, the death of Marie Joseph from consumption aged only twenty-three. Her illness and death had a deep impact on the young community, particularly upon Marie Eugénie, who at only twenty-five, was caring for the dying young woman as tenderly as a mother.

With the start of a formal noviciate Thérèse Emmanuel was asked to assume the pivotal role of Novice Mistress, forming those who entered in the spirit of the Assumption. This was a service within the Congregation that she would continue to fulfil until her death forty-six years later. After the death of Thérèse Emmanuel, Marie Eugénie recalled her zeal for the liturgy and her immense love for the Divine Office, a love, which, as we have seen, was first installed in her by her experiences at school at New Hall:

*« In the early days, she insisted more than anyone that we pray the Office... She was always highly attached to it, and inspired in the novices, during all the time that she formed them, love and devotion for the Office of the Church. »*<sup>46</sup>

Young as they were, both Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel were carrying the weight of substantial responsibilities. Their roles led them to rely on the mutual support of one another, as well as, of course, teaching them through experience that they could depend on God's providential care:

*"God gives to each one the lights necessary to accomplish the duties to which he calls them; I believe this because I've more than once experienced it."*<sup>47</sup>



■ 43 *Les Origines de l'Assomption I*, (Ed. 1898) pp. 415-416

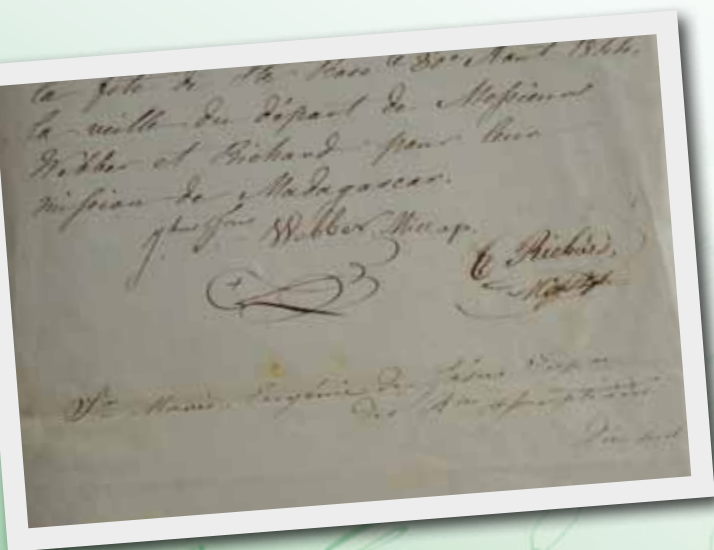
■ 44 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon no. 1561, 16th September 1842

■ 45 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, no. 172/01, May 1841

■ 46 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1888

■ 47 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1842

## « *The world is too small for my love* »<sup>48</sup>



The zeal of the first sisters for the extension of the reign of God was truly remarkable. It found one of its expressions in the missionary attraction present from the earliest times in the community which itself was marked by its internationality. On the feast of St Rose of Lima in 1844, Marie Eugénie engaged in a missionary union of prayer, both in her own name, and in the name of the Congregation, for two Missionnaires apostoliques, on the eve of their departure for Madagascar, and with two others who had already left for China. Significantly, this missionary act was written by Thérèse Emmanuel and signed by Marie Eugénie.

A few months later, on Christmas day in 1844, as the first five sisters made their perpetual profession, alongside the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, their desire to serve the Kingdom can be seen in the fourth vow which they added: *“to consecrate myself, according to the spirit of our Institute, to extend, by all my life, the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.”*

■ 48 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes No. 160/01, May 1837

As we will see later, the expression of this vow has evolved as the years have passed.

While this zeal for the extension of the reign of God was externally seen by their school and envisaged in further apostolic works in the future, there was also the ongoing interior work of allowing God to be Lord of their own hearts and minds. Marie Eugénie continued to struggle with Marie Augustine, even asking Father d’Alzon if she could make a vow to do all that she could to not distance herself from her.<sup>49</sup>

And while Thérèse Emmanuel and Marie Eugénie were growing to depend upon one another, all too human jealousies and insecurities still marked their relationship. This is clearly illustrated in a letter of Marie Eugénie to Father d’Alzon where she says that Thérèse Emmanuel is a sister with whom she has no natural affinity, and laments at the thought that he has more rapport with and esteem for Thérèse Emmanuel than for her.<sup>50</sup> However, when Thérèse Emmanuel’s life was threatened by scarlet fever complicated by pneumonia, Marie Eugénie wrote to Father d’Alzon:

■ 49 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1592, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1843

■ 50 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, no. 1616, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1844

*“If I lose her, if God deprives me of this help, what will become of the work? Is it possible that I can carry the burden alone?”*<sup>51</sup>

Like all strong friendships, theirs was built on years of learning to both appreciate their differences of character and to depend on one another. As the years passed, they would increasingly complement one another through their differences; both were essential for this work of God to continue. It is no wonder that Thérèse Emmanuel is popularly acclaimed as ‘co-foundress’ of the Religious of the Assumption.

As the years went by both the community and the school grew in number and to enable the expansion of the school, a large property on the right bank of the Seine at 96 rue de Chaillot was an ideal next move. While the old house was far from in good condition,<sup>52</sup> with leaky roofs and an ugly basement for a refectory, the seven and a half acres of land meant that there was plenty of room for expansion. During the twelve years that the sisters were here there were also exciting new foundations, both far away and within France.

■ 51 Les Origines de l’Assomption II (Ed. 1898) p. 431

■ 52 Cf. Mother Marie Walburge, Memoirs, H’9: “The house at Chaillot, old and dilapidated, was situated in a very beautiful garden...”



## Counting on the Lord for the grace of the mission

In 1848 the Missions Étrangères asked Marie Eugénie to begin a foundation in China and the sisters were very tempted by the idea.<sup>53</sup> Whilst discerning that this wasn't appropriate for them at that time, only a year later they responded positively to the request of an Irish missionary, Bishop Devereux, for the sisters to found a community and run a school in Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Despite their youth and small numbers, just a decade after their foundation, the Religious of the Assumption became the first sisters to live and work in South Africa.

In 1849, three sisters, Marie Gertrude, Marie Liguori and Marie Véronique, accompanied by a novice and two Irish postulants, as well as two young women who would later become Religious of the Assumption, boarded the boat for the Cape. After a hazardous four-months voyage, they faced numerous severe difficulties in living the life of

Religious of the Assumption so far from Paris and in a country with many pressing needs, including war, famine and destitute orphaned children.

The situation became more complicated when Bishop Devereux, who had accepted into the noviciate some young Irish women he knew, sent back French sisters, because they spoke too often of their desire to live like the sisters in Paris. In a situation which would certainly have necessitated adaptations, they worried about being faithful to the spirit of the Parisian community. It had been expected that the Bishop, with the agreement of Marie Eugénie, would begin initiatives which would not detract from the spirit of the Congregation. Since communications were limited and slow, and sometimes letters didn't arrive, contact wasn't easy and misunderstandings multiplied. After a new, fruitless, sending of sisters, there remained at the Cape, with the sisters called by Bishop Devereux, only two sisters from

the Religious of the Assumption, Marie Gertrude and Marie Marthe.

Marie Eugénie, who didn't have the means to know exactly what was happening, called the community back to Paris in 1852. The two sisters choose to remain at the Cape, and formed, with the Irish sisters, what would become later the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption.

Marie Eugénie suffered enormously from worry over the situation in the Cape, *"this thorny corner of our little Assumption."*<sup>54</sup>

By this time Thérèse Emmanuel was in England in Richmond, Yorkshire, leading a new foundation there, and their correspondence reveals a great deal about their relationship, particularly how they confided in one another, giving and receiving support, advice and encouragement. Aware of the precarious situation of the community in the Cape, Marie Eugénie asked Thérèse Emmanuel if she would be willing to be sent there.

■ 53 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon N°1953, July 1848, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1848

■ 54 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No 287, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1850



Her response, full of trust and openness to the will of God, contrasted with the attitude of Gertrude:

*"If you send me, dear mother, I will count on the Lord for the grace for the mission. ... I will try to have perfect obedience and at least I shall be able to do God's will for he will be there to help me to accomplish what he inspires you to do for the government of the congregation. ...*

*So, dear mother, do with me what is best for the congregation."*<sup>55</sup>

Since Thérèse Emmanuel had been sent to Richmond to lead the new community, Marie Eugénie had taken responsibility for the noviciate in Paris. This time apart helped to build their relationship, as they came to realise even more deeply how much the sisters needed both of them, working together for the good of the body-congregation.

Integral to their relationship was Thérèse Emmanuel's obedience and profound respect for Marie Eugénie's role as Superior General. They were both aware that Thérèse Emmanuel's conduct would be looked to in years to come as an example to follow.<sup>56</sup>

Their relationship was built upon trust and obedience. This is well illustrated by an occasion on which Marie Eugénie gently but firmly corrected Thérèse Emmanuel, and the open-hearted manner in which Thérèse Emmanuel received her superior's reprimand. Due to illness in Richmond, it had become impossible for the sisters to continue saying the Office together, and although Marie Eugénie had promised to send another sister, she delayed in doing so because there was illness in Paris at the same time. When Thérèse Emmanuel wrote a second time stressing the urgency of another sister being sent, she received the

following reply:

*"I did not approve, my dear daughter, of either the spirit or the content of your last letter. ... as superior the observation is scarcely appropriate. ... You may be sure that in speaking in this way, I see neither you nor me, but only the duty of my office."*<sup>57</sup>

*«It seems to me that God has brought me here so that I might see his strength and my weakness.»*

*Thérèse Emmanuel*

The letter continued with friendly news about many other things and Marie Eugénie concluded by saying that she was glad to have found a way to send the sister who was needed in Richmond. Thérèse Emmanuel responded humbly, acknowledging that she had been wrong in writing as she did and asking for forgiveness.

As well as being an occasion for Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel to grow further into their respective roles in the Congregation, the two years which Thérèse Emmanuel spent in Richmond were remarkably fruitful.

■ 55 Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1851.

■ 56 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel no. 359, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1851

■ 57 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel no. 357, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1851



She and the community not only began a small orphanage but reached out to the women who worked in the local mills, including Sarah Thompson who was renowned for taunting the Irish Catholic workers, and who it is reported, was converted just by the look of Thérèse Emmanuel, declaring her to be an angel.<sup>58</sup> Importantly for the future of the community, the local school teacher, Miss Frances Burchall, asked to join the Congregation,

and after her noviciate in Paris, she was sent back to Richmond to lead the community there in place of Thérèse Emmanuel, with the religious name of Sister Marie Ignace. It seems that God was providing for all their needs.

Yet, despite all the outward signs of success of the new foundation in Richmond and the seeming universal acclaim of Thérèse Emmanuel, she herself was extremely aware of her fragility and her need to rely totally upon God. She shares her interior poverty with Marie Eugénie:

*"It seems to me that God has brought me here so that I might see his strength and my weakness."*<sup>59</sup> On her short return to Paris in April 1852, a few months before she was to return permanently, she burst into tears at the table, overcome by sadness and an intense concern with England.



■ 58 Cf. *Les Origines de l'Assomption III* (Ed. 1900) p. 213  
 ■ 59 *Les Origines de l'Assomption III* (Ed. 1900) p. 222



Marie Eugénie later wrote:

*« She has become very English, extremely preoccupied with all that people have said to her about the necessity of a separate English province. ... It is time that she returned to France. Pray for her. I hope that she soon recovers. It always seems to me that the second place is a violent state for Sister Thérèse Emmanuel and this reflection causes me to suffer. If she were in charge of it, the French congregation would greatly interest her. »*<sup>60</sup>

Back in France Thérèse Emmanuel once again took up her role as Novice Mistress.



■ 60 Marie Eugénie, *Letter to Father d'Alzon* no. 2242, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1852



Foundations in the next few years set in place the key elements of the mission of the Religious of the Assumption: schools, houses of adoration to which a school would be quickly added, outreach to the poor and spiritual relationships with lay people through the Third Order. In 1854 the foundation in Sedan, in north east France, ran a boarding school, led by Marie Thérèse after she had spent her first few months there unexpectedly caring for the victims of a cholera epidemic.

The following year a house of perpetual adoration was opened in Nîmes, in southern France, home of Father d'Alzon and the Assumptionists. Here, in order to maintain adoration of the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day the sisters sought the help of lay people. It was the beginning of a pattern of lay collaborators working with the sisters to enable the mission that has since become a key feature of the family of the Religious of the Assumption.

While the sisters began with the house of adoration and offering retreats, before long a boarding school would be established there as well.

In the same year the sisters bought the Chateau de la Thuilerie at Auteuil in Paris, and in 1857 they moved from rue de Chaillot to begin religious life in their new mother house, a large gothic style monastery, which could be the heart of the rapidly expanding Congregation. Here Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel lived and worked closely together, planning further foundations and sharing the joys and challenges of the growing Congregation. In the following years communities were founded in different places in Europe, including, in 1879, a house of adoration, with a school and a residence for women, at Cannes, where Thérèse Emmanuel was to spend the last few years of her life, benefiting from a milder climate than that of Paris.

After an unsuccessful foundation in New Caledonia from 1873 to 1876, the sisters waited until the 1890s to found convents outside of Europe. Before the death of Marie Eugénie in 1898, convents and schools had been successfully established in Nicaragua, the Philippines and El Salvador.

Looking back to these early days of the Religious of the Assumption, we see how the Spirit who guided Marie Eugénie, Thérèse Emmanuel and their first companions has inspired thousands of women to follow in their footsteps. Remembering the two young women gathered in the small apartment on Rue Férou, we can join Marie Eugénie in marvelling at all that God has done since then, *"Who saw this in the beginning? ... Who foresaw these things? Our Lord alone knew..."*<sup>61</sup>

We turn now to consider how the Lord guided the first sisters as they began the arduous task of writing their constitutions. As we will see, looking at the evolution of the Congregation through this lens will provide rich insights into the charism of the Religious of the Assumption.

■ 61 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1884



*« Tell me, my dear Father, the impression  
that you have received of the community of Bergerac.  
I would like that you gain a little knowledge  
of their rules and how they live religious life...  
All these things imprint its character on an order.  
It is good to know well in advance  
in which direction we should head. »<sup>62</sup>*

*Saint Marie Eugénie*



Following these pages, in which we learnt of the History and histories, let us now pause in Auteuil, at the Archives.

Let us push open the door... A treasure, a legacy, the origins to be discovered in the form of documents and memories. Time's barrier melts away.

We are at the secret of the beginnings, at the heart of the Congregation's history. Lives and passions will be revealed. A history that inspires, now and forever.

The Constitutions.

Letters organized in batches, numbered; notebooks; sheets of paper of every colour and size. The scent of old paper dating back nearly two centuries, having survived events, moves and even bombings. The scent of paper but also of sanctity – of life with all its failures and conflicts, life with its joys and victories, of daily following Christ on the path of holiness. Documents which tell of temperaments, characters and cultures.

On these large-sized sheets are two columns: the text studied and the comments. Writings which overlap, forming one single column, guidelines mixed with notes. Marie Eugénie has a prominent and influential role here, and Thérèse Emmanuel adds the final touches. There are as many drafts and notebooks as there was work undertaken. To change one line sometimes meant recopying an entire book. Copies, copies and more copies... for circulation. They were needed for Paris, Nîmes, Cannes, Rome... at a time when the post was still transported by horses.

Thus was the Rule – the Constitutions – edited by several hands, article after article.



## To Write the Rule

To write the rule was to build the Congregation: one stone, another and yet another upon the single stone that was Jesus Christ. It was strategical work, in which our two mothers, Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel, would give of themselves without restraint: *"To make our small hive a house of peace, charity, fervour"*<sup>63</sup> and *"to steer us to heaven in a boat"*.<sup>64</sup>

The hive and the boat – two images, two temperaments, two experiences that made an impression on the Congregation and that still speak of the Assumption today.

A passionate and tumultuous adventure with unflinching care, a fellowship of the Spirit, all underscored by a *"firm and ardent faith"*.<sup>65</sup>

*« May the Lord himself dictate the spirit that he wants us to have. May he one day turn our small hive into a house of peace, of charity, of fervour. »*

Marie Eugénie  
Letter to Joséphine de Commarque, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1839

■ 62 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1838

■ 63 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Joséphine de Commarque, No. 1178, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1839

■ 64 Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, Vol. I, 1901

■ 65 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1878



## Constitutions or Rule

How many times would this be said: *"Father, learn the rules and practices of religious life ... as these are the things which impart the character of an Order"*.<sup>66</sup> First to Father Combalot, then to Father d'Alzon, these words indicate that Marie Eugénie wished to impart a certain character upon the Congregation. She would do so under the loving hand of the Potter who continued to shape her life, trusting God, who invited her to the adventure, suggesting *"secret follies that delighted her heart"*.<sup>67</sup>

With no *"improvised constitutions, we will need to map out the rules, to define a way of life, of studies, an aim for our efforts"*.<sup>68</sup> Everything about it was oriented towards writing: to observation, clarification, interpretation, making provisions. It draws upon Tradition, interprets the rules of the great Orders, consults religious houses, makes inquiries of many people, asks their opinion, and includes friends and acquaintances in its research. Marie Eugénie was not satisfied with what existed, quickly researched and with ill-defined insights.

She would compose, recompose, write and rewrite. The list of spiritualities that inspired her was long. What interested her was the experience of others, but what she sought had to be *"our spirit, our primary asset. This whole includes us all and is the true character of our Institution."*<sup>69</sup> Her thought was not to do something new, *"we were extremely far from that"*,<sup>70</sup> but to set down *"what brings us closer to the ancient orders"*:<sup>71</sup> from the Visitation, the spirit and the way of life; from the Benedictines, the Divine Office; from the Dominicans, the search for truth; from St. Augustine, the Rule....

*«All that an Augustinian does within his monastery, a good Dominican should also do in his life of zeal and as an apostle. And so, too, my sisters, this should be a model for us.»*

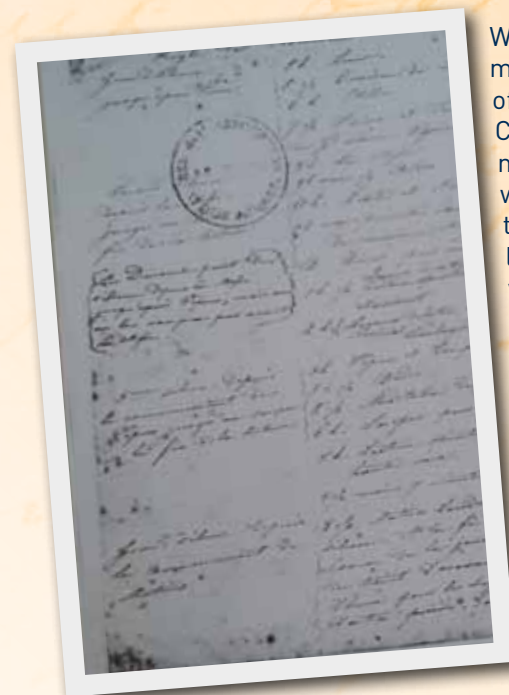
Marie Eugénie  
Chapter Instruction, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1878

But there were also the Carmelites, the Jesuits, the Franciscans... A broad exploration and, ultimately, a work of synthesis like a stained-glass window where each glass piece finds its light in the harmony of the group.

Why did Marie Eugénie mention the Rule so often when writing the Constitutions? In the monastic tradition, the word 'Rule' described the monastic way of life. Only later did the word 'Constitutions' appear, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century described the specific legislation of the Institute. Did she choose the word 'Rule' because of its connection to the monastic tradition? What is certain is that the first sisters,

advised by Father Combalot, would choose to attach themselves to the Rule of Saint Augustine because of his Prologue. Marie Eugénie *"loved spiritual beauty, forever old and forever new"*<sup>72</sup> in the faith that she *was called to possess one day.*<sup>73</sup>

From the very beginning, Marie Eugénie would ask Father Combalot to write, to *"draw up something of a rule and initial plan of conduct to follow"*; <sup>74</sup> and he would write – but it was an Introduction, and *"it was probably the most beautiful thing he wrote."*<sup>75</sup> Marie Eugénie knew that *"this first seed is important. When it has been completed and adjusted through experience, the Constitutions will emerge from it. Even if imperfect at first, it has to exist; it is important not to change it except with great care and in the certainty that it would be for the best."*<sup>76</sup>



■ 66 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No 42, 21<sup>st</sup> Septembre 1838  
■ 67 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1590, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1843  
■ 68 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 42, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1838

■ 69 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1884  
■ 70 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1889  
■ 71 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1884

■ 72 St Augustine, Confessions, Book 10, XXVII, 38  
■ 73 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 194/01, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1844

■ 74 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 88, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1839  
■ 75 Les Origines de l'Assomption I (Ed. 1898), p. 341  
■ 76 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 88, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1839

The rest would be written by Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel in 1840, inspired by the Order of the Visitation. But tensions would soon emerge. Monsignor Affre, Archbishop of Paris, who read the Constitutions, found them “edifying”,<sup>77</sup> but didn’t they include many things to be put into practice? There were also difficulties with the writing: how to say things, how to express our mothers’ intuitions – the inspiration of the Spirit and the will of God – in a manner acceptable to the men of the Church? Three years later, following Monsignor Affre’s dissatisfaction, Marie Eugénie would bemoan that of Monsignor Gaume, who raised the issue of an overall flaw of the Constitutions, “the flaw of simplicity and a purely religious character”.<sup>78</sup>

Supported by Thérèse Emmanuel, Marie Eugénie persisted: “if it is necessary to change it significantly, then let us fully do so while remaining faithful to our spirit and in accordance with our ideas.”<sup>79</sup> Time was short, as they wanted to make their perpetual vows at Christmas in 1844, but they could not do so without the final version of the Rule, which became “a matter of life or death”.<sup>80</sup>



«... To touch the Rule for the purpose of revision, when, like ours, it was written in bits and pieces, is the same as touching a house that is only partly built. My task is to do so only as necessary, with as much experience as I can acquire. I shall always be happy to have been obliged to do this, for if I were to die, it would be as good as settled. Those who succeed me will find it more difficult to say what is needed and have it accepted.»

Marie Eugénie

Approval finally arrived, and Marie Eugénie wrote to Father d’Alzon: “in fighting firmly and gently, I have obtained, for the crux of the Rule, nearly everything that is essential... Only one thing has troubled me, and that is to see the most important parts of our future at the mercy of the utterance of a man who understands little about our work.”<sup>81</sup>

But the victory was still not won. In 1854, the time arrived to present the Statutes or summary of the Constitutions to Rome for initial approval. The editing continued until 1866, but the ‘Véron affair’<sup>82</sup> would complicate and delay the approval of the Institute. What followed was a series of 24 Animadversiones, notes from Rome that would be handled by Marie Eugénie, Thérèse Emmanuel and the Chapters of the Congregation. It was the work of a discerning community.

Throughout those years, from 1839 to 1888, it was necessary to amend the Rule! But “to touch the Rule for the purpose of revision, when, like ours, it was written in bits and pieces, is the same as touching a house that is only partly built.”<sup>83</sup> Up until the final approval of the Constitutions in 1888, our mothers would demand the best on behalf of the Congregation, in faithfulness to their earliest insights. It would be life that would put the final touches to the Rule.

■ <sup>77</sup> Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 113, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1840  
 ■ <sup>78</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1590, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1843  
 ■ <sup>79</sup> Ibidem  
 ■ <sup>80</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1634, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1844

■ <sup>81</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1647, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1844  
 ■ <sup>82</sup> See insert on this subject, p. 73  
 ■ <sup>83</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 3114, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1866



## The Writings of a Community

The writing of the Rule would thus take time and much energy: *"it is a horrible task to even write what we know: it is difficult and exhausting."*<sup>84</sup> The editing of the Rule would take 49 years, the duration of a friendship with Thérèse Emmanuel, a friendship that would express itself through vision, intuition, ideas, conversion, but also through respect, consideration, love, encouragement, prayer... and that would be secretly written in their hearts, as they attuned to one another and sought harmony for the good of the whole Congregation.



Marie Eugénie was not alone. She would involve the community, though the sisters were not many at first. Encouraged by Father d'Alzon, she worked constantly with Thérèse Emmanuel, who was more instructed in the inner life: *"she who*

*confers with God... It is a great deal for me to see this soul so guided by God. All that God does in her makes me believe that he has holy plans for this work. I would like this to be felt somewhat in our Rule"*.<sup>85</sup> If Thérèse Emmanuel did not like the form of the Rule, together they arrived at *"something consistent with the practice and with 'our spirit'"*. Even *"Marie Augustine is delighted with our efforts, as are the other sisters."*<sup>86</sup> Thus, all became involved in the common act of editing the Rule, with constant help from Father d'Alzon.

God spoke to Thérèse Emmanuel's heart as much for the good of the Congregation as for her own sanctity; and her gift was to be inhabited by the Scriptures, that book which she unlocked and through which *"God showed the way"*.<sup>87</sup> Yes, the Scriptures would lend their 'weight' to the Rule: *"In the Scriptures, you will find a host of passages that express what you want to say, and in using the sacred text, you will have a double advantage, that of receiving, or rather, seeking your Rule in the Word of God, and that of preventing your thoughts from being assailed."*<sup>88</sup>

Father d'Alzon would accompany them, both in the editing of the Rule and in their path to holiness, and he would entrust them to each other.

*«I wholly entrust you to Marie Eugénie; you will act with all the prudence and charity needed for the good of this excellent mother and the entire house.»*

Father d'Alzon  
Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1845

Even if Thérèse Emmanuel, "lifted up" by God, caused some astonishment, as we will see later, she remained a comfort to Marie Eugénie in everyday matters, an effective woman with regard to the practical details of the organisation of the boarding house. She concerned herself with everything, including dance lessons, physical education, and teachers.

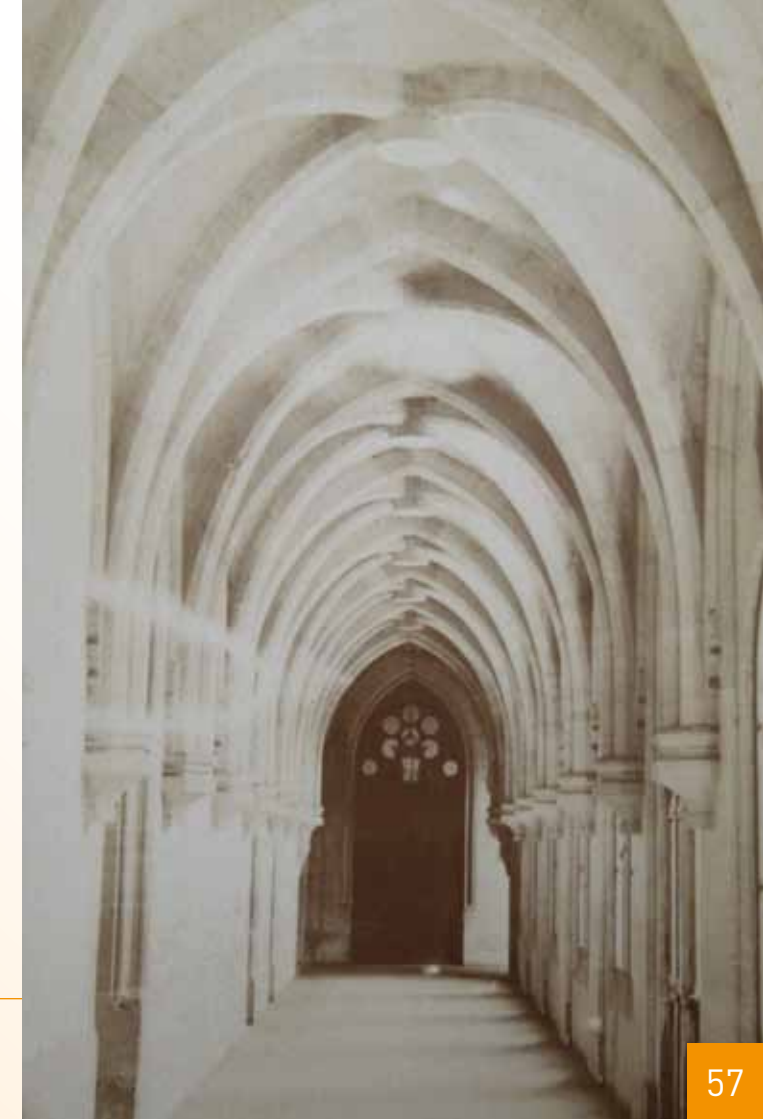
■ 84 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 3127, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1867

■ 85 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1590, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1843

■ 86 Ibidem

■ 87 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1590, 27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> August 1843

■ 88 Father d'Alzon, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1843





To each, her grace. In the flat on Rue Férou, “the rule was posted: arise, pray... A single word may offend!” Whereas Thérèse Emmanuel viewed ‘recreation’ as a childish word, preferring *leisure time*, Marie Eugénie saw it as a community exercise.

This cultural distance, this *friction between natures*, was it not “*precisely what carves the stone, what chisels... the small rough patches that one may find in saints or in the relationships between saints: this is unavoidable.*”<sup>89</sup> While Marie Eugénie visited the archbishopric, Thérèse Emmanuel “*did her work: to sanctify herself! It is this goal that we should pursue throughout our lives, like painters or sculptors.*”<sup>90</sup> She prayed at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament, and this would be her way of imparting a spirit to the Congregation.



In her brief rules for the novices, she would stress how our lives in themselves are nothing extraordinary: “what gives merit to our actions is the inner spirit through which we raise them towards God.”<sup>91</sup>

Temperaments and natures confronted and rounded each other out in the very form of the Rule.

Whereas “Thérèse Emmanuel wanted everything defined that seemed useful to her for the sisters”,<sup>92</sup> Marie Eugénie preferred the Rule to be as short as possible. However, she pointed out: “one can never say that my counsel is the only one that I would follow. If I am moved to create a long chapter, I will let our sisters make the choice. I would like the long one to be left for the Directory.”<sup>93</sup> And everything was written at the same time, very freely: “if some small things do not receive approval, they can be left for the coutumier... and where unclear points are concerned, it is best to maintain a certain breadth.”<sup>94</sup> It was in this spirit that the early team worked.

■ 89 Les Origines de l’Assomption I, (Ed. 1898), p. 301 ss

■ 90 Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices of the Assumption, 1901, Vol. I

■ 91 Cf. Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, 1901, Tome I

■ 92 Cf. Father d’Alzon, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1843

■ 93 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1596, 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> November 1843

■ 94 Father d’Alzon, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1843



## The Rule: A Living Atmosphere

The Rule and the Constitutions would engage our first sisters until the death of Thérèse Emmanuel. This written text was a sign and a confidence, its purpose was to fortify everyday life, to make sense of choices and to justify a way of life, to orient decisions, to recall a radicalism in moments of formality. It represented faith in the future and wholly belonged to it.

Since its origins, we have referred to the Rule as though it was definitive. To Marie Thérèse, who loved her family so much, Marie Eugénie would write: *"You love your family – so love it. Our spirit is not so austere that we require anything other than to be as Our Lord. He loved his mother, his good Saint Joseph (and I imagine that your father resembles Saint Joseph). He left them only to serve his heavenly Father. This is our Rule: to leave all, to lose all, to sacrifice all for the glory of God, to go with joy where it pleases him to send us, with no sense of compulsion in our hearts but with the joyous freedom of the children of God."*<sup>95</sup>

■ 95 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Maria Thérèse, no 1189, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1841



*« This is our Rule:  
to leave all, to lose all,  
to sacrifice all for the glory  
of God, to go with joy where  
it pleases him to send us,  
with no sense of compulsion  
in our hearts but with the joyous  
freedom of the children of God. »*

Marie Eugénie



In the Congregation, it was customary to pray to the Lord for the Rule, and this is what Marie Eugénie wrote in her letter of profession in 1844. After asking for the grace of holiness for Father d'Alzon, for the repose of the soul of her mother, for the sanctification of the sisters, especially for Thérèse Emmanuel, she wrote: *"May you yourself form our spirit, guide our studies, be the author of our Rule..."*<sup>96</sup> It was over the Rule that the sisters would make their vows, and it was charged by the Rule that Marie Eugénie would convene a General Chapter in 1870, the first following the approval of the Institute.

Finally, *"in accordance with the Rule, she took the advice of her counsellors regarding the time and place of the Chapter."*<sup>97</sup> The Rule as a living atmosphere, irrigating everyday life, far more than a piece of paper or a secret book.

To write the Rule in this way was a founding grace of which we today are still the beneficiaries. With Marie Eugénie, we can bear witness that God, through the Rule, *"strengthens my attraction and my calling."*<sup>98</sup>

■ 96 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No 247/01, Christmas 1844

■ 97 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Convening of the General Chapter, Letter No. 1532, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1870

■ 98 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Gros, No. 1504, November 1841

# The Written Rule<sup>99</sup>

Three themes: The Aim, Office, Studies and the fourth vow, will reveal to us the editing until the final Constitutions. In their development and movement, these themes are the sign of the Spirit at work in the influences and circumstances of life.

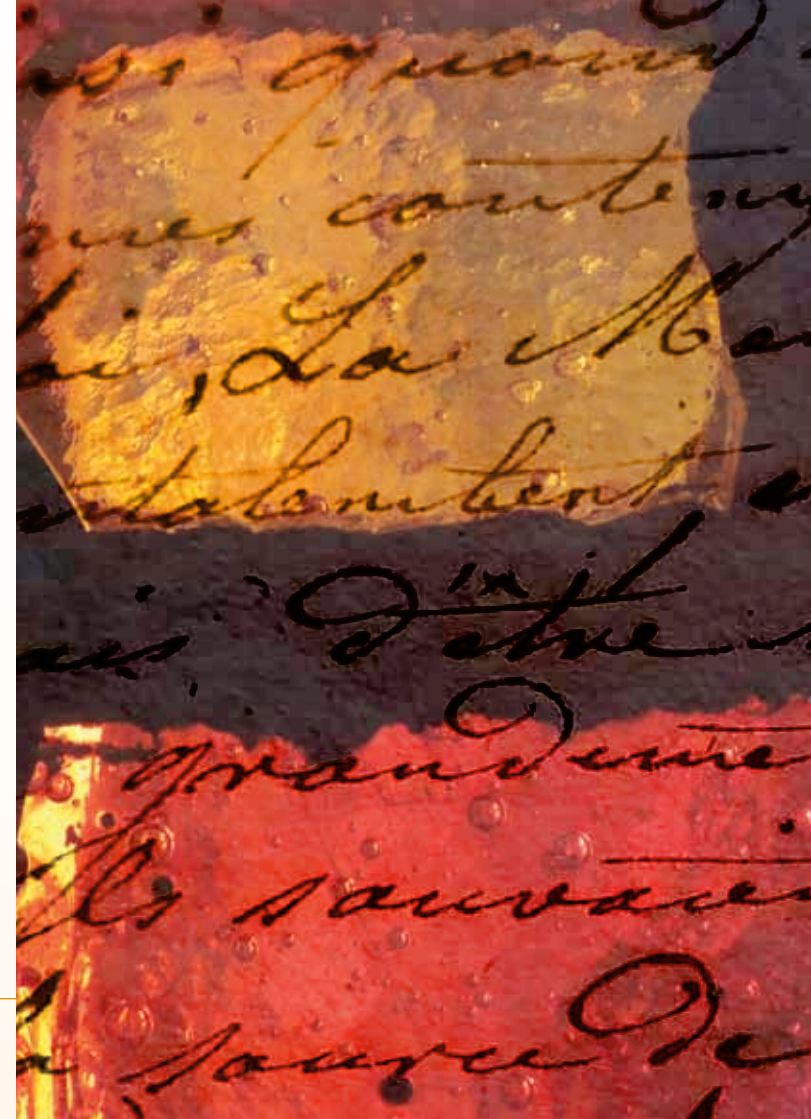
Filled with the History and histories, with direction and significance, with the Tradition and traditions, today they still stir our lives and move our minds and hearts. These are the themes that speak to our faith and mission, that are the subject of real tensions with the Church – a matter of life or death!

Thus, in speaking of the Aim of the Institute, “the true goal, the true seal”,<sup>100</sup> we see a horizon open, spirituality strengthened, and the charism being written. Through the theme of the Office, it is the spiritual life of the Church and personal growth or formation which are highlighted. And finally, present since the beginnings,

the question of Studies which illuminate the contemplative life. We see the mission expanding and our spirits enriched.

## Expression of an Evolving Aim

This excerpt from the Prologue of the present Rule of Life takes us back to Marie Eugénie’s thoughts at the beginning: “Her single vision of Jesus Christ and the extension of his Kingdom, determines even today the Way of Life of the Religious of the Assumption: a contemplative life nourished by silence, the divine office and personal prayer, the source and strength of their apostolic and missionary zeal”.<sup>101</sup> In 1840, the chapter on the Aim was a summary of the Introduction to the Constitutions, by Father Combalot, the only chapter of our own, as the rest was inspired by the Order of the Visitation.



« The attempt at the Constitutions that I have attached contains the little that I did with Sister Thérèse Emmanuel before my retreat. Please return it to me with your comments in the margins... but be sure to tell me what you think. It seems to me that we could keep the first sentence and develop it a bit with regard to the spirit of re-clothing in Jesus Christ in the intellectual order. »

Marie Eugénie  
Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1592, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1843

■ 99 Full text of the Constitutions, Foundation Texts I, 1991

■ 100 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1590, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1843

■ 101 The Rule of Life of the Religious of the Assumption, Prologue, 1982





In 1843, Marie Eugénie believed that they were “not sufficiently established to dare to express our aim as I feel it.” In fact, it would not be articulated in the Constitutions of 1844, of which a first attempt, written by two hands, can be seen in the Archives. Yet in the same letter, Marie Eugénie declares: “The true aim, the true seal of our work is in its inner consecration to the Mystery of the Incarnation and the sacred person of Jesus Christ, as well as the attachment of the Most Blessed Virgin to Jesus Christ.”<sup>102</sup>

■ 102 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1590, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1843

In 1854, when the Aim had to be written down for its initial presentation to Rome, there was only one paragraph: “to unite with Our Lord and to work to make him and his Blessed Mother known and loved.” Next came the means: “prayer, the education of the upper classes, the education of the poor and retreats for women.” And a new touch – the possibility of going on Missions.

By 1866, the sisters’ lives and faith experience would develop and enrich the Aim to arrive at a substantially similar but more detailed expression. The means were expressed through a broadening of the understanding of the Mystery of the Incarnation, a change from Our Lord to “Our Lord Jesus Christ”, and the emergence of a way of life that was “semi-contemplative and semi-active”, in which the means are mentioned. The chapter ends with this sentence that recalls the spirit of the order’s beginnings: “The Spirit of their Institute is a great spirit of faith, of zeal... and filial love for the Holy Church.”

In 1888, in its final wording, the Aim was restructured and reformulated. There also appeared adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, so desired and hoped for: “The goal of the Religious of the Assumption is to imitate the Blessed Virgin in her love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially through the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar, and through education and zealous works to labour to make Jesus Christ and his Holy Church known and loved.” The ending draws our attention: “the spirit of the Institute is to bring all things to Our Lord Jesus Christ... and to work throughout their lives to expand the Reign of the Saviour.” Momentum created, zeal recognized and experience put into words, the culmination of numerous battles to acknowledge and express adoration and zeal through the Aim, recapturing the fourth vow.



## The Divine Office

A few months before the foundation, Marie Eugénie received the motto *Maria assumpta est*<sup>103</sup> when she was praying the Office of the Assumption. As previously mentioned, from very early on, the Great Office “was the appeal of all the sisters”.<sup>104</sup> “Nothing maintains the religious spirit like the Office. It allows one to identify with the spiritual life of the Church and to achieve a calm development of faith in the things of the mind.”<sup>105</sup> It would be a struggle to preserve it when the ecclesiastical superiors wished to suppress it in the name of realism, alternately proposing the Office of the Blessed Virgin or the Parisian Breviary, asserting that “the Latin Office is generally approved as being part of the rules for the nuns, but it is not indispensable. Could we not replace it with more useful work?”<sup>106</sup>

But the sisters held fast: “We need to preserve it as our dearest asset and inspire those who will come after us with a great love for the prayer of the Church so that it may always remain with us.”<sup>107</sup>

How was this expressed in the Constitutions? In the beginning in 1840, there was an entire chapter devoted to the Office, inspired by the Visitation. From the start, formality and solemnity were necessary: “The Latin Office will be recited in the choir, with great respect and attentiveness. At the first sound of the bell, all the Sisters will leave their work to go there, as if called by their divine spouse. They will meet in the avant-chœur to enter the chapel with modest solemnity and, two by two, bow deeply before the Blessed Sacrament.” They insisted on preserving the dignity of this important act that should not be forgotten; we see how a way of life was unfolding, a liturgy of life and a formation for the Kingdom. There were four choir sisters!

In 1844, a change in style, more about observance, with an insistence on the importance of being present at the Office, the “public prayer of the Community, which makes us participate in the desires and interests of the Church and should become for us a great source of strength, of light and religious spirit, even in our active duties.” It is where we exercise charity, where the community is established, where our ‘existence for the Kingdom’ is built.

The period that would follow would be painful for our mothers. During the presentation of the Constitutions in 1866, L’Abbé Véron<sup>108</sup> expressed his reservations to Rome and slowed down the approval of the Constitutions.

The Office was now placed in the Aim of the Institute, giving it importance. The chapter itself was considerably reduced. The emphasis focused on the spirit in which the office was celebrated: fidelity, zeal and attentiveness. The responsibility of each person was stressed, as this was one of the most important duties imposed by the Rule. Meanwhile, Rome remained sceptical, and amongst the Animadversiones issued at the time of approval of the Institute on 14th September 1867, one concerned the Office.<sup>109</sup> Strengthened by experience and sure of the need for it, Marie Eugénie justified ‘our’ choice: “for the Assumption and its special calling to bring action out of prayer, we insist that adoration and the Office are necessary for the Institute.”<sup>110</sup>

Another paragraph was added to the Constitutions proposed in 1888: “That the Office, the prayer of the Church, is the first and foremost devotion of the sisters, faithful heirs of the zeal for the Holy Liturgy that motivated the first members of the Congregation.” It was concerning “giving the devotion a more ecclesiastical character, more solid, more universal, more traditional, that which summarizes all the praise which has been given to God from the earliest times of the Church, since the Synagogue and the Patriarchs.”<sup>111</sup>

What would the Church authorities say? In March 1888, Marie Eugénie went to Rome where she again learned of reservations regarding the Office. One cardinal even asked for approval to be refused if these were not lifted. Determined, she replied: “Our aim is the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the Divine Office and the education of children.” On 14th April 1888, a telegram arrived at Auteuil and Cannes: “Decree obtained. Constitutions unchanged. Eugénie.” Mission accomplished! This had been a real battle fought for the preservation of this good that was so dear and necessary to the mission. Chapter Instructions<sup>112</sup> and several Breviaries in the Archives testified to this.

■ <sup>103</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Joséphine de Commarque, No. 1176, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1838

■ <sup>104</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Gros, No. 1504, November 1841

■ <sup>105</sup> Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1556, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1842

■ <sup>106</sup> Note by Mgr Affre regarding the Constitutions of 1840

■ <sup>107</sup> Les Origines de l’Assomption I, (Ed. 1898), pp. 416-418

■ <sup>108</sup> See insert below p. 73 and Partage Auteuil, No. 78

■ <sup>109</sup> 24 Animadversiones, or comments issued by Rome regarding the Constitution of 1866

■ <sup>110</sup> Reply to Animadversio 11 from Rome, 1867 (001-f)

■ <sup>111</sup> Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1878

■ <sup>112</sup> Sister Thérèse Maylis, Etudes d’Archives, No. 1, Part II A



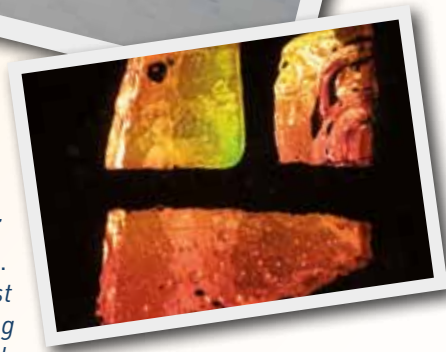
## Studies and the Fourth Vow

Two chapters perplexed Marie Eugénie the most, the one on study and the article on poverty.<sup>113</sup> For her, “*what distinguishes our studies is not to learn more but to learn all that I have just said before the rest!*”<sup>114</sup>

This was a reference to faith. Because as she would later say: “*What is it about study that enlarges the character and the mind? What is it that strongly coordinates all the things which have been learned, that serves as their purpose, link and reason? In a sense, this is a philosophy; in another sense, it is a passion. But what passion should one give? That of faith, of love, of the realization of the law of Christ.*”<sup>115</sup>

From the beginning of 1840, a chapter on Studies states that “*the time consecrated to study as well as to the instruction of students is the greatest means of spreading the Kingdom of Our Lord, and there is nothing else to seek, neither self-love, nor the desire to learn, nor curiosity, the enemy of humility and evangelical simplicity.*” For the Constitutions of 1844, the spiritual orientation –

“*that all the energies of their minds and affections of their hearts be fixed on Jesus Christ*” – and apostolic orientation – “*to bestow love and the knowledge of the truth*” would be more developed. Studies are very much “*the most important means of spreading the Kingdom, but by the humble use of an ability that comes entirely from God!*” The sisters were called upon to see the “*houses as schools of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*”.



Three major foundations were emphasized: “*meditation, a living and profound faith, and charity*”. One feels the unity of life, with no separation between intellect and faith.

A few years later in 1866, this chapter disappears from the Constitutions, but “*the greatest means for spreading the Kingdom*” would find a new form in the fourth vow:<sup>116</sup> “*to work throughout their whole lives to extend the kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ within souls.*” This vow became a “*vow of mission*” and involved the sisters who made it committing to being ready to leave.

This desire for the Kingdom was already present in the “*thought of zeal*”<sup>117</sup> of our first mothers, as a missionary spirit. On the day of their perpetual vows, Marie Eugénie and the first sisters had expressed this as follows: “*To consecrate myself according to the spirit of our Institute, by all my life, to spread the Kingdom of*

*Our Lord Jesus Christ within souls.*” Rome would ask for this to be removed. Thérèse Emmanuel wrote: “*it is a cause of universal regret: ask for something else in its place.*”<sup>118</sup>

In the end, only a few sisters had taken the vow: the first, Gertrude who left for the Cape, Marie Agnès, for Malaga, and several others...

« *But what passion should I impart? That of faith, of love, of the realisation of the law of Christ.* »

Marie Eugénie

But the ideal of zeal would be rediscovered in 1888, in the Aim of the Congregation, as part of the spirit of the Institute and no longer in the form of a vow: “*to bring everything to Our Lord Jesus Christ and to work by all their life to expand the Kingdom of the Saviour within souls.*”

From the Aim, the Office and the Studies to the work for the Kingdom – this was the formula of the vow! “*For love of Jesus Christ and in answer to his call, I desire to give myself to Him, freely and forever, and to devote my whole life to the extension of his Kingdom.*”<sup>119</sup>

■ 113 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1615, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1844  
■ 114 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1556, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1842  
■ 115 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1627, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1844

■ 116 Sister Thérèse Maylis, Etudes d'Archives, No. 1, Part II B  
■ 117 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Gros, No. 1504, November 1841

■ 118 Thérèse Emmanuel, Reply to Animadversio 5 from Rome, 1867, (001-f)  
■ 119 Rule of Life of the Religious of the Assumption, No. 39, 1982

The Constitutions were now ready, and the Bishops of the dioceses where the Congregation existed – France, England and Spain – wrote letters of recommendation to Rome. In 1888, Marie Eugénie visited Cannes to pay her respects to Thérèse Emmanuel, who always assured her in the same manner, “*God will be with you, dear Mother*”, before she went to Rome. Marie Eugénie was accompanied by the 35-year-old Marie Catherine, who would become the third Superior General. It was a long road... but the Constitutions<sup>120</sup> were finally approved with no significant changes. The decree was signed by Pope Leo XIII on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1888, and were issued on 14<sup>th</sup> April to Marie-Eugénie, who immediately informed Auteuil and Cannes by telegram. To Thérèse Emmanuel, she addressed these final lines: “*no important changes, and I am content for the most part, except that the French is sometimes a little abused in the writing.*”<sup>121</sup>

Upon returning to Cannes on 29<sup>th</sup> April, the eve of the feast of St. Catherine of Siena and the anniversary of the Foundation, Marie Eugénie went to Thérèse Emmanuel who, afflicted with tuberculosis, was living her final moments. Upon her bed lay the approval, the testimony of their long path together. It was time to say goodbye: “*I belong to the*



*Assumption – my life was wholly dedicated to it. I am not leaving; I am going to the Assumption of Eternity. Great duties remain for the elders: they must show the way, train the novices and declare what we ought to be. The Congregation is entering a new phase: a phase of development and blossoming through the recognition that the Church has just given to our lives. We must renew ourselves in our original spirit, to give God the glory that he expects from us.”*<sup>122</sup>

■ <sup>120</sup> The term ‘Constitutions’ would be permanently adopted in place of the ‘Rule’, just as ‘Nun’ would be replaced by ‘Sister’  
 ■ <sup>121</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1888

■ <sup>122</sup> Cf. Partage Auteuil, No. 52

She renewed her vows in accordance with the form approved by the most recent Constitutions and then, overwhelmed by suffering, turned to her Lord: “*How long must I suffer?*” Still, she thought of her return to Auteuil, planned for 7<sup>th</sup> May: “*How can I make the trip? I will arrive through obedience!*”

Thérèse Emmanuel died during the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1888, surrounded by her sisters. Marie Eugénie would say: “*I close your eyes, dear Mother, you who so often enlightened the way for me on earth!*”

■ <sup>123</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel, Last words, Narrative of the final days of Thérèse Emmanuel, May 1888  
 ■ <sup>124</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Picard, No. 3684, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1883

*« I close your eyes,  
 dear Mother,  
 you who so often  
 lighted my path  
 on this earth! »*

Marie Eugénie

The following day, after picking some roses in the garden with the nurse, Marie Eugénie adorned Thérèse Emmanuel’s bed: “*I offer these flowers to you, dear Mother, you who sent them to me so many times.*”<sup>123</sup> In losing Thérèse Emmanuel, Marie Eugénie lost more than half her life.<sup>124</sup> So

ended a path of common effort: “*I committed her to courage, and she preached sweetness to me, though she was the most courageous and I the weakest.*”<sup>125</sup>

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May, Marie Eugénie wrote to the Congregation: “*You all know what this Mother was, what we owe her spirit of prayer, of zeal, of fervent love for all in the service of our Lord, the Office, adoration, the religious spirit. She burnt herself up with all of these.*”<sup>126</sup> Monsignor Gay, who for 40 years was her

spiritual father, would perform the funeral eulogy. He saw her as an “*admirable contemplative. She relied so completely on God... It was as though her soul possessed a window that was constantly open to the unseen world.*”<sup>127</sup>

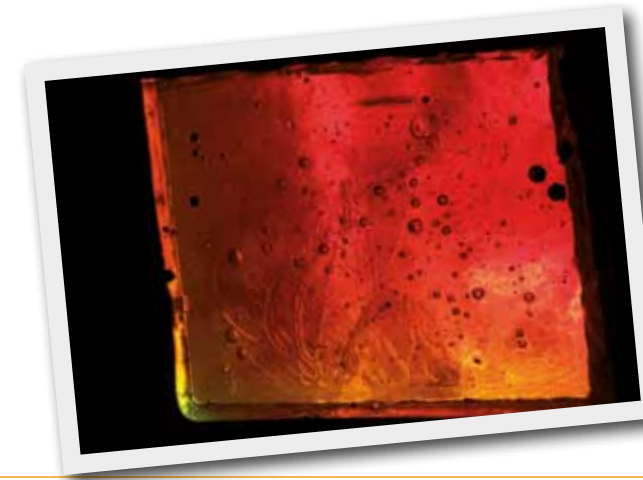
■ <sup>125</sup> Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 180/01, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1842  
 ■ <sup>126</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to the Congregation, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1888  
 ■ <sup>127</sup> Mgr Charles Gay, Speech at the service of ‘trentaine’ for Thérèse Emmanuel, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1888, Chapel at Auteuil





Marie Eugénie would remind the General Chapter of 1888 of *"the most mourned Mother of all... whose blessing was upon us. Not everyone would have the same grace, but everyone could make the same effort."*<sup>128</sup>

The path continued, and the Congregation expanded: the numbers were not what mattered. It was the *beehive* and the *boat* that ensured the mission, the friendship between Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel that crossed the oceans in a *boat* and built the community like a *hive*.



■ 128 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1888

### *L'abbé Paul Véron (1815-1867)*<sup>129</sup>

L'abbé Véron, Ecclesiastical Superior from 1859, though kind at first, changed his attitude with the presentation of the Constitutions to Rome. He feared that the Congregation was detaching from his authority in attaching itself to Rome. In 1866, Marie Eugénie went to Rome to present the Constitutions and requested a blessing and a letter of recommendation from the Bishop, which was given but with reservations written by the Ecclesiastical Superior, information which would be seen in Rome when needed.

This information was a veritable folder of accusations against Marie Eugénie, her authority and her government. Meanwhile, l'abbé Véron regularly visited Auteuil, where he wielded unacceptable authority, interfering in everything – the finances, the sisters' transfers, even the travels of Marie Eugénie who, when faced with this situation, considered various possibilities of resigning, convening a General Chapter and moving the Congregation to the diocese of Versailles. However, l'abbé Véron was appointed to a parish in Paris, where he would die suddenly in March 1867. With this, progress immediately resumed, and the section on the Government, now finally edited, could be presented to Rome.

■ 129 Partage Auteuil, No. 78



*« The pilot who steers a vessel always keeps his eyes on the compass in order to navigate the ship. He does not mind the clouds or the wind but directs all his attention towards maintaining the correct position with the aim of arriving at the journey's end... »<sup>130</sup>*

*Thérèse Emmanuel*





# A Mutual Affection

## "I love you as a Mother, as a sister, as a friend..."

On the boat of the Assumption, the relationship between Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel took on different hues according to the times, from the foundation to the foundations. Between temporary misunderstandings and declarations of fidelity, between everyday life and reflections on the Constitutions, the crossing was sometimes tempestuous, but the long voyage of the foundation solidified the union of the hearts of the two "foundresses", their mutual esteem being sealed with each challenge that was overcome for 'the life of our Assumption'...<sup>131</sup>

When their obligations to the foundations, the need for rest, or the work on the Constitutions were a cause of distance between them, their correspondence was full of sisterly friendship and sensitivity. On behalf of the sisters, Thérèse Emmanuel often expressed missing Marie Eugénie when she was absent: "We have been without you for ten days, and your absence weighs heavily upon me ... I do not have to tell you what

you mean to me."<sup>132</sup> From their agreement on the garden, to the parents of the students, their mutual sharing would never end: "I already need to tell you so much ... my heart is full of words when it turns towards you."<sup>133</sup>

In 1850, Thérèse Emmanuel left for Richmond, and Marie Eugénie felt lonely: "You are missed quite often by this poor heart that nevertheless rejoices at the good you are doing..."<sup>134</sup> The long-distance support was coupled with affectionate attention: "The grace and peace of Our Lord be with you, my dear Daughter... take care of yourself. Take a carriage – don't walk too much."<sup>135</sup>

Even if sometimes there were questions: "I find you excellent in your work, my good and dearest daughter, as I've always expected of you ... however, when I have time, I wish to send you a few comments about some things that I think could be done better."<sup>136</sup>

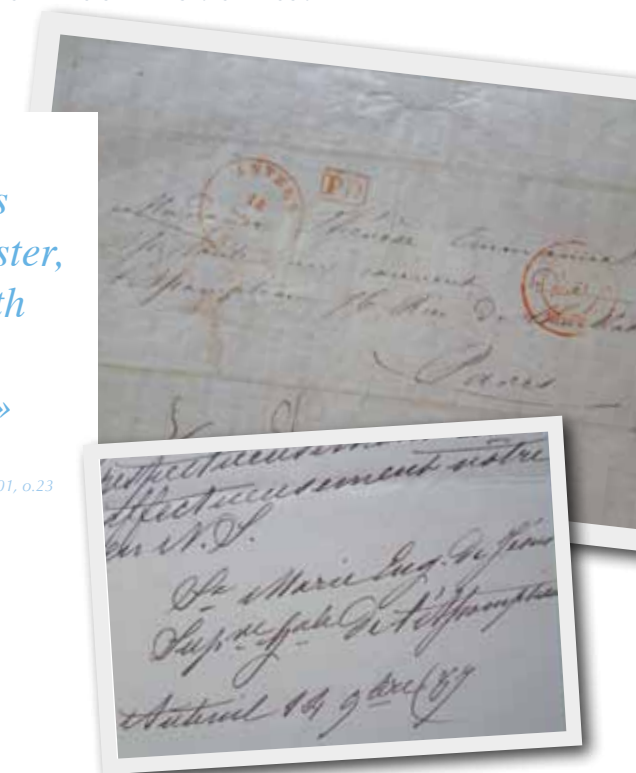
To the affection of Marie Eugénie who loved her "as a Mother, as a sister, as a friend",<sup>137</sup> the devoted Thérèse Emmanuel replied: "Just as you are my Mother, so am I your daughter, and because I have loved you for so long, I believe that I love you better than anyone."<sup>138</sup> Marie Eugénie wished for God to give her wings to "visit Richmond once a week".<sup>139</sup> She awaited the return of her companion with great impatience!<sup>140</sup>

Through their correspondence, we can perceive their need to carry everything together: the foundations, their impressions of the houses, the details of the architecture,<sup>141</sup> the composition of the communities,<sup>142</sup> room changes,<sup>143</sup> illnesses, the lack of fervour or model renunciation, the search for money, the projects, the bishops, the young sisters... From the usual signature of Thérèse Emmanuel, "your most devoted daughter", to "your mother, wholly yours", "from the foot of the cross"

or "in the heart of Jesus" – from 1839 to 1888, this fifty-year relationship was one of great depth, linking them like an invisible thread.

« I love you as  
a Mother, as a sister,  
as a friend, with  
all my heart  
and my trust. »

Marie Eugénie  
Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, 26 mai 18501, o.23



■ 130 Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, Vol. I, p. 207.  
■ 131 Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1886

■ 132 Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1844  
■ 133 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 260, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1844  
■ 134 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 290, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1850  
■ 135 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 282, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1850  
■ 136 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 316, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1850

■ 137 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1850  
■ 138 Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 2 January 1852, Holy Name of Jesus  
■ 139 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 328, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1851  
■ 140 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 355, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1851  
■ 141 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1013, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1883

■ 142 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1071, Saturday (Holy?) 1885:  
"I hasten to tell you for Sister Marie Bathilde that I will not be sending her to Lyon without reaching an understanding with Mother Agnès because the presence of Sister M. Paul."  
■ 143 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1068, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1885

# Marie Eugénie, Superior General

## A « Heavy Burden »



The strength of this friendship would help Marie Eugénie to assume her burden as Superior General, accepted in obedience to God's plan. Upon her arrival at the Visitation in 1838, she asked for the grace of *"dying to this life of selfishness and pride, forever present and renewing itself"* in her.<sup>144</sup>

Her union with Christ, which took her outside herself, was a hallmark of her spiritual life. On 18th March 1839, immediately before returning to Paris, she wrote to Father Combalot: *"I hope... that the burden of our work may never fall on any but us, and that we may carry the others so gently and constantly that they may never suffer..."*<sup>145</sup>

Self-forgetfulness and the acceptance of suffering for the welfare of her sisters – from the very start, this was how Marie Eugénie envisaged her role at the heart of the community. She relied upon Father Combalot, whom she recognized as her Superior, striving to obey him despite his idiosyncracies. When there was a misunderstanding between them, she felt *"charged with the role"*<sup>146</sup> of having to express the desires of her sisters *"as frankly as possible"*.<sup>147</sup> Thus, she assumed her position by serving the unity of the young community. The consequences were serious: they found themselves without a Superior, and Marie Eugénie sought a possible future path, continuing in self-forgetfulness and a great sense of duty.<sup>148</sup>

Having never *"wanted to be a founder"*,<sup>149</sup> she agreed to take on *"the burden placed upon her, she who was so young in years and virtue"* in this *"foundation without a founder (or worse than without founder)"*.<sup>150</sup>

She reminded Father d'Alzon that she had not chosen this heavy task, emphasizing that the sisters needed *"a little of the experience and encouragement of those who possessed it... the authoritative words of a founder or superior"*.<sup>151</sup>

For the sake of Christ, she accepted the need to *"hold a place in hearts, the responsibilities of which often weighed on her nature"*<sup>152</sup> in service and charity towards others.<sup>153</sup> She enjoyed contemplating the public life of Jesus *"as a model of superiority"*, desiring to *"prayerfully study every action and every word in order to prepare herself as Superior"* while *"weighing his words as a talent of gold, with great respect and great zeal to conform myself to them"*.<sup>154</sup> When *"governing turned burdensome"*, she resorted to obedience,<sup>155</sup> and when she felt *"unsuited"* to lead the sisters, leaving them too much at liberty. She then charged herself *"to simply help them to give themselves entirely to Jesus Christ"*.<sup>156</sup>



■ 144 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 40, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1838, 1<sup>st</sup> day at the Visitation  
 ■ 145 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 85, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1839  
 ■ 146 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Combalot, No. 134, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1841

■ 147 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father de Salinis, No. 1503, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1841  
 ■ 148 Ibidem  
 ■ 149 Marie Eugénie, Discours on the beginnings of the Congregation, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1881 (in Foundation Texts II, p. 237)  
 ■ 150 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1561, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1842

■ 151 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1552, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1842  
 ■ 152 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1777, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1846  
 ■ 153 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 190/01

■ 154 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 206/01, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1848, Retreat  
 ■ 155 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 312, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1850  
 ■ 156 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1571, no date



In spite of everything, Marie Eugénie was genuinely recognized by the community, with Thérèse Emmanuel being the first to express this: *“It is you, my dear mother, who by your fidelity attain union with Our Lord, who supports you with your difficult burden”*.<sup>157</sup>

She also conceived of her role as Superior as that of a businesswoman.<sup>158</sup> For her, the work was paramount. As the link between the parlours, correspondence and travels, she always dedicated herself *“to the general good of the house”* rather than the *“individual interests or characters”*.<sup>159</sup>

Father d’Alzon never ceased to encourage her to assume this responsibility. On her first journey to Nîmes for the work of the Constitutions, she wrote to Thérèse Emmanuel: *“He wants me to leave here with the resolution to always act as Superior.”*<sup>160</sup>

He also convinced her to envision the possibility of being re-elected in perpetuity.<sup>161</sup> During the Chapter of 1858, Thérèse Emmanuel, the Assistant General, proposed the election of Marie Eugénie for life since there was *“no one better who could gain the sisters’ trust and govern in accordance with God’s plan.”*<sup>162</sup>

*«I so implore Our Lord to make you strong ... to preserve what we together have recognized as being absolutely essential for the life of our Assumption.»*

Thérèse Emmanuel,  
Letter to Marie Eugénie, 14 February 1886

She was said to be *“ready to comply with whatever was desired and determined”*, on the condition that she could always resign or be granted her resignation in the event of an emergency.

In 1864, Marie Eugénie requested a permanent Council to serve as a support and a check for the Superior General and to share in the responsibility for the necessary corrections of the Constitutions.<sup>163</sup> The history of General Chapters highlights their continued efforts to *“act in agreement with the entire Congregation”* in a true spirit of collegiality.

## Spiritual Friendship with Father d’Alzon

In 1838, at Chatenay, Marie Eugénie met Father d’Alzon, a young friend of Father Combalot, for the first time. Without speaking with him for long, she felt *“a great deal of respect and trust”* for him. A correspondence, based on mutual freedom, openness and the resolve to never fear to hurt each other, was established from 1840 onwards. In 1841, Marie Eugénie, who was happy to see *“so many shared ideas”* between them, found a firm support in him when Father Combalot left. Encouraged in her responsibilities as Superior and having found a broadminded intermediary to help her define the spirit of the Assumption, turning to him for all the concerns of her heart, Marie Eugénie obediently trusted his word. He assisted in the drafting of the Constitutions while she supported the foundation of the Fathers of the Assumption and their development. Their mutual influence was undeniable; their relationship, which would survive several misunderstandings related to the development



of the two Congregations, weathered the storms. The year before his death, Father d’Alzon wrote to Marie Eugénie: *“Only God remains and a few friends, when God allows it. I place you at the forefront of those left to me.”*<sup>164</sup>

■ 157 Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 1843

■ 158 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 287, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1850

■ 159 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 291, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1850

■ 160 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1844

■ 161 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 195/01, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1844 ; direction given by Father d’Alzon

■ 162 Cf. Notebook of Chapters, cited in Partage Auteuil, No. 34, p. 30

■ 163 Ibidem

■ 164 Father d’Alzon, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1879

# *Thérèse Emmanuel, Novice Mistress: « I will enlighten you, but... this is for the others »*

While Marie Eugénie assumed the mission of Superior, Thérèse Emmanuel would spend almost all her life fulfilling her responsibilities as Novice Mistress: *“Nothing is so continually exhausting as the burdens of others ... She was in charge of more sisters and even more annoyances than I ... She has surely taken more than half my burden, and no one else is always ready to assist or stand in for others...”*<sup>165</sup>

Marie Eugénie sometimes found that, being unable to efface herself,<sup>166</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel “would too often draw her novices’ attention to herself”.<sup>167</sup> She saw a danger in this for the future, fearing that the novices, being too attached to their first Superior, would not recognize her own authority. Not quite knowing how to speak of this to Thérèse Emmanuel, she finally decided to change her own attitude, to engage more with the younger sisters and to create trusting relationships.

When directing the young professed after their novitiate, she sought to occupy their minds with “social thoughts, broad and active ideas” in order to do the opposite of Thérèse Emmanuel, who, while meticulous in small matters, seemed “to be very close to their souls (...) drawing them into the mysteries and union with Jesus Christ”.<sup>168</sup> Attributing great importance to formation, Marie Eugénie believed that the entire future rested on the young sisters: *“The Congregation will be lost if they lack the spirit that must motivate them ... We are all foundation stones.”*<sup>169</sup>

Despite all this, there was no doubt that the role of Novice Mistress suited Thérèse Emmanuel and helped her to come out of herself: *“She never fails to wait for grace. She knows how to wait and be patient, to guide the weak, to support and stimulate the strong.”*<sup>170</sup> Her demands follow from her love of convent life:



*“This fiery soul cannot bear that one might demean the monastic life to the point of acting without thinking.”*<sup>171</sup> In her teaching the novices, she compared the small details of convent life to “diamonds”: *“each word of our Rule has been weighed with the greatest care ... The monastic life is like a gold mine in which the least portion, the least atom is precious.”*<sup>172</sup> She also insisted on the importance of the intention of the heart, through which the simplest things are lifted up to God,<sup>173</sup> as *“there is nothing indifferent or useless in the spiritual life.”*<sup>174</sup>

She saw herself as a mother, charged with “giving life”, preparing the novices for “a new life, the life of Jesus Christ”,<sup>175</sup> who unites the sisters with one another,<sup>176</sup> a life that must be “surrounded with care and culture”.<sup>177</sup> Her vision of support was to respect the individuality of those called, to “discover the good in them in order to help them develop it”,<sup>178</sup> by humbly welcoming the “seasons” of the heart.

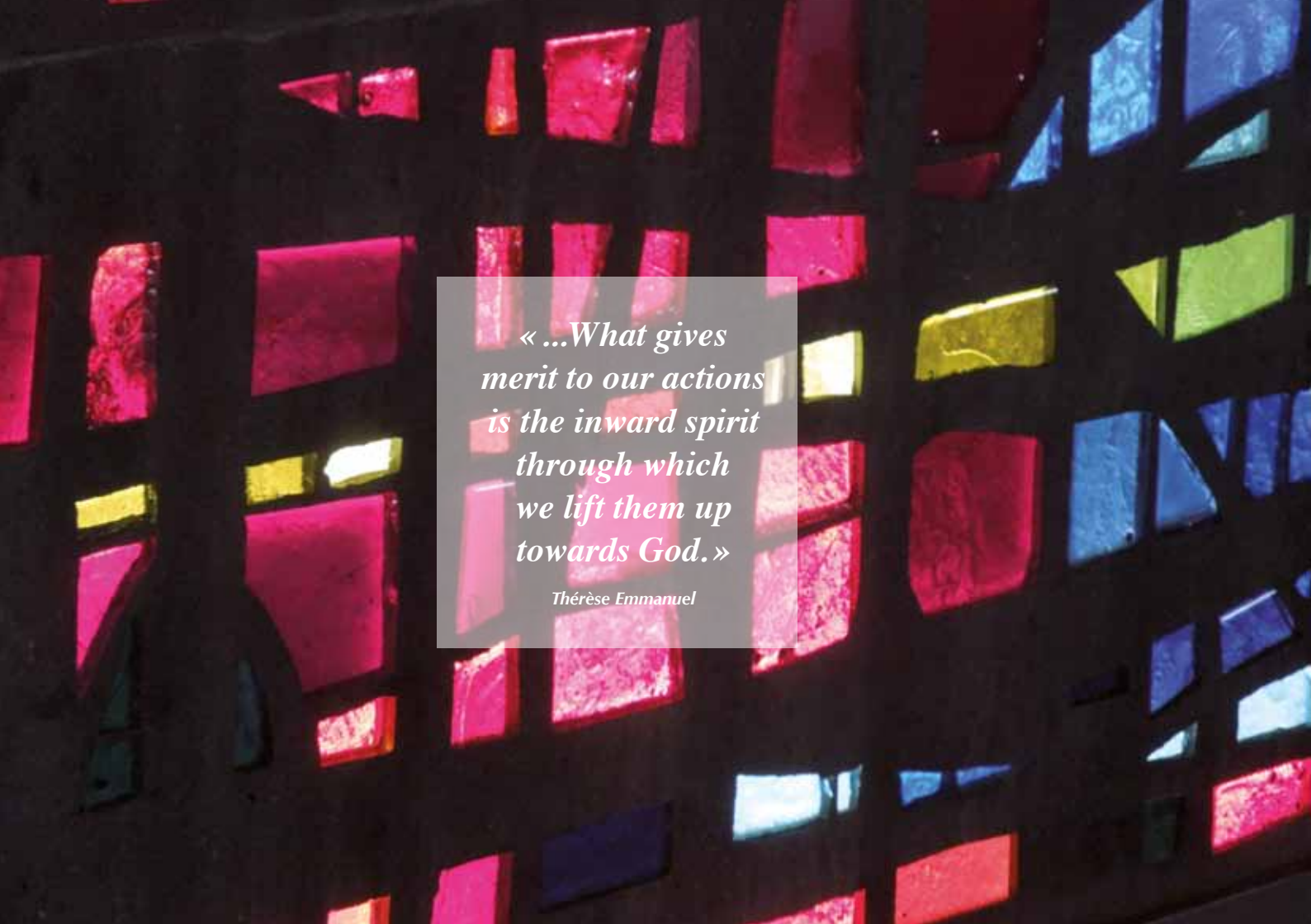
■ <sup>165</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1566, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1842  
 ■ <sup>166</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1698, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1845  
 ■ <sup>167</sup> Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1777, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1846

■ <sup>168</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1705, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1846  
 ■ <sup>169</sup> Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 325, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1851  
 ■ <sup>170</sup> Une Mystique du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Mère Thérèse-Emmanuel, p. 107, 1934  
 ■ <sup>171</sup> Ibidem p. 110

■ <sup>172</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, Vol. 1, p. 5, 1901  
 ■ <sup>173</sup> Ibidem p. 34  
 ■ <sup>174</sup> Ibidem p. 7  
 ■ <sup>175</sup> Ibidem p. 18

■ <sup>176</sup> Cf. Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, Vol. 1, p. 9  
 ■ <sup>177</sup> Cf. Ibidem p. 19  
 ■ <sup>178</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, Vol. 1, p. 16





« ...What gives  
merit to our actions  
is the inward spirit  
through which  
we lift them up  
towards God. »

Thérèse Emmanuel

We gradually become religious through being educated by the life and by taking care not to try to be Carthusians when we are Jesuits!<sup>179</sup> This inner transformation requires the cooperation and commitment of the novices, who are partners in their own training; those supporting them can only work around them.<sup>180</sup>

Mindful of the sisters' gifts but also of their struggles and sadness, leading them ceaselessly back to the Lord, their "friend", their "brother", their "spouse",<sup>181</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel welcomed her responsibility as a fulfilment of the word of God about her: "I enlighten you with infinite care, but... this is for the others. I have made you a channel, for irrigation." And on the subject of the sisters: "Each has her perfume, her colour, her form, her unique and special nuance. We must not want them to all be the same... It is variety that creates the beauty of the garden. Our wish should be to help each to be what she must be..."<sup>182</sup>

Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel gave us an example of faithfulness to the love of Christ and His calling, of a sense of responsibility and a simplicity of heart through all our human frailties. How could we not give thanks for these two wakes which marked the crossing of our ship, the Assumption?

« *The various feelings  
we experience are like  
the different seasons ...  
and, just as the night follows  
the day and the rain follows  
the sunshine, we should not  
be astonished to feel darkness  
and shadow following  
the sweetness and light  
in our souls.* »

Thérèse Emmanuel  
*Instructions to the novices, Vol. 1, p. 23*

■ <sup>179</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel, *Instructions to the novices, Vol. 1, p. 47*:  
"A Jesuit who aspires to the perfection of a Carthusian will be a poor Jesuit."  
■ <sup>180</sup> *Ibidem* p.63

■ <sup>181</sup> Cf. Thérèse Emmanuel, *Letter to a novice, quoted in Une Mystique  
du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Mère Thérèse Emmanuel, p. 124, 1901*  
■ <sup>182</sup> *Une Mystique du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Mère Thérèse Emmanuel p. 117, 1901*



# Like a Tree Whose Roots Are in Christ

"Unity of spirit" was important to Marie Eugénie, who desired that we should live in accordance with the rule, that we should all understand it in the same way in order to live *"in the same spirit, with the same practices, in such a way that all are in a faithful unison with the centre."*<sup>183</sup> In an 1891 Chapter, having recalled the general form of this spirit, she recommended that the sisters *"maintain this fraternal bond that is so powerful, this strengthening of hearts in unity"*, since the Lord is *"a sweet and strong bond"* which shall keep them united.

Several trials were still to come that would shake this desire for unity: the departure of Father Combalot, the 'Véron affair', the difficulties linked to the foundation at the Cape... In 1849, Thérèse Emmanuel herself was tempted by a new founding plan of Father Combalot: the Religious Contemplatives of the Incarnate Word. But this did not subsequently prevent her from being a great support to Marie Eugénie.

At the time of the founding of Richmond in 1850, when the local novices were starting to arrive, some people suggested the idea of an English novitiate to facilitate the entry of young women into the Congregation. Marie Eugénie resisted the idea: *"In the order of my duties and for the true future development of the Congregation, the unity of spirit stands much higher than the current expansion in any place and by any person."*<sup>184</sup> The future was at stake: *"We must look to the future more than to the present, for there will be no future for the Congregation unless we have subjects who are highly trained and filled with the spirit of unity."*<sup>185</sup>



She insisted: *"I am determined that all shall draw from unity, in a single centre, the spirit in which they must someday work."*

She would return to the need for passing through the mother house<sup>186</sup> when the family of the young Amy Howly, cousin of Thérèse Emmanuel, refused the idea of a novitiate in Paris.<sup>187</sup> Nothing *"seems more important"* than this common novitiate, *"especially since there are so few of us."*<sup>188</sup>

Only a postulancy would be opened in England. Thérèse Emmanuel sided with Marie Eugénie: *"If only you knew how much I yearn for unity with you and how I fear the slightest cloud ... that arises between you and me!"*<sup>189</sup> To one of her novices, Thérèse Emmanuel wrote with regard to Richmond: *"It is impossible for us to enjoy a greater unity with all of you ... the roots of our life lie deep within the soil of Paris, and it is from there that it draws the energies that are manifested here."*<sup>190</sup>

Another event was emblematic of the struggle for unity. In October 1885, Sister Marie de la Nativité, the Superior of Cannes, left the Congregation under complex circumstances. The conditions of that departure<sup>191</sup> provoked a serious crisis between Father Picard and the Superior of the Little Convent of Auteuil, Sister Louise Eugénie. In fact, after numerous twists and turns, the Superior issued Marie de la Nativité with the letters she had claimed, despite Father Picard's having forbidden this. The latter saw this as an act of disobedience, and on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1886, he ordered an injunction upon the Little Convent: the withdrawal of both the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and the chaplain.

■ 183 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1876

■ 184 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 312, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1850

■ 185 Ibidem

■ 186 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 312, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1850

■ 187 Les Origines de l'Assomption III (Ed. 1900), p. 257

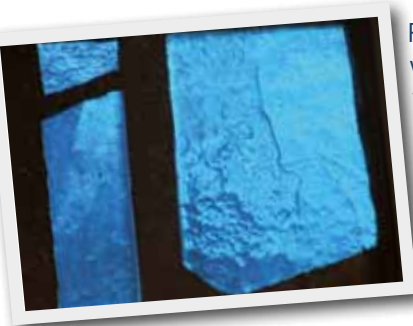
■ 188 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 315, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1850

■ 189 Les Origines de l'Assomption III (Ed. 1900), p. 260

■ 190 Ibidem pp. 217-218

■ 191 Cf. Partage Auteuil, No. 12, pp. 27-37





From Cannes, where she was resting, Marie Eugénie wrote to Father Picard on several occasions, expressing her readiness to make amends for past mistakes but clearly raising the question of government.<sup>192</sup>

Upon her return, the situation with Father Picard and some of the sisters was tense. Monsignor d'Hulst, now informed of the situation, judged the Congregation as being *"weary of its Superior General"*<sup>193</sup> and requested the convening of a General Chapter which Marie Eugénie herself wanted: *"I am at the disposal of the Congregation, whatever its decision."*<sup>194</sup> Even if Monsignor d'Hulst modified his judgement slightly after a visit to Auteuil, Marie Eugénie, certain that *"nothing can be re-established except by charity"*,<sup>195</sup> maintained the need for the Chapter, which would allow them to see *"all that is best for the Congregation"*.<sup>196</sup> Thérèse Emmanuel demonstrated unwavering friendship: *"I suffer with you, dear Mother, through that which makes you*

*suffer; and I tell you this in the spirit of the unity of heart that exists between us."*<sup>197</sup>

Overwhelmed by the suffering imposed on their foundress, she bowed before her demeanour, *"deeply moved, and touched by patience, humility and the love of her heart"*, which she received as *"a great lesson"*.<sup>198</sup> This echoed the experience of Marie Eugénie, who lived a kind of Passion: *"One must carry one's cross with love and through love, which lends a certain joy and lifts me up."*<sup>199</sup> This final test sealed the union of the two hearts,<sup>200</sup> and it was Marie Eugénie who reassured Thérèse Emmanuel: *"If they wanted my resignation, they don't want it any more; the Chapter will be extremely opposed to it ... Do not be afraid – many things shall be turned to our advantage..."*<sup>201</sup>

*"Let us place ourselves under the watchful eye of God and make ourselves worthy of performing His will and receiving His light."*<sup>202</sup> It was in this way that the Superior General opened the Special Chapter which saw unity reinforced and relationships with the Fathers clarified, even if it would take some time to clear the air with Father Picard.

Together, Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel learned to depend on God: *"Whom to trust with our affairs? Man fails, but God remains."*<sup>203</sup> He alone was capable of bestowing immense and valiant hope: *"He can act freely. We rely on the greatest source of help in relying upon Him."*<sup>204</sup>



■ **192** Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Picard, No. 11652, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1886  
 ■ **193** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father Picard, No. 11676, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **194** Ibidem  
 ■ **195** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1089, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **196** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1094, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1886

■ **197** Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **198** Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **199** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1095, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **200** Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **201** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, No. 1097, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1886  
 ■ **202** Cf. Partage Auteuil, No. 34, pp. 36-38

■ **203** Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1886  
 ■ **204** Thérèse Emmanuel, Letter to Marie Eugénie, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1887

«*A*ccording to the fervent desire  
that you impressed on my heart...»

As women of faith, Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel drew the strength to move forward from their relationship with Christ, receiving from him the gift of perseverance through trials.

Early on, the soul of Thérèse Emmanuel was seized by the mystical life; her consciousness of the greatness of God and her own insignificance often brought her back from rebellion to surrender. One day, while witnessing her struggles, Father Combalot relieved her of all her vows. But she felt ill in her freedom: *“I did everything to make her recover”,* said Marie Eugénie. *“I spent hours, prayed... I dared to make her vow to consecrate herself to the glory of God and to choose no other way of life but for that purpose. With this act of generosity, her tranquillity and fervour returned, and ever since then, I have always directed myself to this...”*<sup>205</sup> Despite her attentiveness to Thérèse Emmanuel, she could not understand this intense spiritual life so different from her own:

■ 205 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1571, no date

«*This gift of God  
that is in the depths of my heart,  
that works and grows within  
our souls – this is what I admire,  
what I love to contemplate,  
what gladdens me in the hope  
that I will possess it, or rather,  
that it will possess me.*»

Marie Eugénie  
Letter to Father d’Alzon, 16 September 1842, Letter 1561

*“God gave her a kind of prayer that I did not know, and I felt a little wary of her imagination. However, we must not take away her faith in God’s guidance: from a little resistance could arise great trouble.”*<sup>206</sup>

At Christmas in 1840, when the sisters were going to Midnight Mass at the Visitation chapel, Thérèse Emmanuel received the grace of Sanctus:

■ 206 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1571, no date

*“Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth!”* She heard this word echo within her heart throughout the entire mass and allowed it to act within her; it would be engraved on her ring at the time of her profession. At the same time, it seemed to her that her soul needed to be *“like an empty stable, naked, battered by the wind, that it must be stripped so that Jesus could be born within it.”*<sup>207</sup>

One day in August 1843, Thérèse Emmanuel confided in Marie Eugénie that while she was alone at worship, it was as though she had been overthrown within by a vision of Jesus Christ, who told her: *“My life was crucified; I want to place my life within you.”* In 1844, she spent the whole of Lent eating nothing but a bit of tea at night or half a cooked apple, according to what God had instructed her to do.

Although she wanted to be *‘open to the free passage of God’*, who was for her *“like the surrounding air that permeates all things”*,<sup>208</sup> the resistance she suffered was no less strong, the doubts no less profound. Marie Eugénie was desperate. To Father d’Alzon, she wrote: *“What do you think I should do for her? Give me your advice; she will rely on mine.”*<sup>209</sup>

■ 207 Thérèse Emmanuel, Handwritten notebooks, Christmas 1840  
■ 208 Thérèse Emmanuel, Handwritten notebooks, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1842  
■ 209 Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, No. 1571, no date



On several occasions, acknowledging the beauty of her soul, she would disclose to him what was happening to Thérèse Emmanuel in order to obtain a better judgement.<sup>210</sup>

In January 1846, having struggled to convince herself that imagination serves no purpose under these conditions, she advised Thérèse Emmanuel to describe her experience to Father d'Alzon, who authenticated it.<sup>211</sup> Monsignor Gay would accompany her for 40 years, encouraging her path to holiness: *"Your inner life consists in constantly saying to God: Amen! And if, as I hope, the holy grace of Our Lord leads you to add 'Alleluia!' then your life, already good, shall have become perfect."*<sup>212</sup>

From the call to allow Christ to *"impress his sufferings upon her soul"* to His words which sometimes resounded when she received communion – *"It is I who am within you"* – Thérèse Emmanuel did not cease to divest herself of her own humanity in the presence of the Christ within her, becoming herself *"Emmanuel"*, *"God with us"*. This was the mystery of a God who gave Himself to a weak woman: *"I called you by my name, because I want my being within you – I want to live within you."*<sup>213</sup>

■ **210** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 2079, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1844  
 ■ **211** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1846  
 ■ **212** Mgr Gay, Letter to Thérèse Emmanuel, cited in *Une Mystique du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Mère Thérèse Emmanuel* p. 147  
 ■ **213** Cited in *Une Mystique du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Thérèse Emmanuel* pp. 56-57



■ **214** Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1855  
 ■ **215** Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 188/01, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1843  
 ■ **216** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 1590, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1843



For her part, Marie Eugénie invited the sisters to seek the mystery of the Lord who imparts his specific colour to their spiritual life: *'What truly matters is that you live your inner life within one or another of these mysteries.'*<sup>214</sup> The mystery of the Incarnation itself wholly seized her: *"Oh my God ..., according to the hope and fervent desire that you have impressed upon my heart, I offer myself to you so that I may be forever in your care, belonging to your sacred Incarnation."*<sup>215</sup> She placed Him at the centre of the spirit of the Assumption and its apostolic dynamic: *"I believe that we are called to honour the Mystery of the Incarnation and the sacred person of Jesus Christ as well as the attachment of the Blessed Virgin to Jesus Christ: this is what governs our views on education."*<sup>216</sup> As we have seen,

■ **217** Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d'Alzon, No. 3174, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1868  
 ■ **218** Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 156/01, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1840  
 ■ **219** Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 168/01, February 1841  
 ■ **220** Cf. Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1878

she would make this the purpose, the hallmark, of the order she founded.

In Christ, she found the support she needed to sustain herself in upright conduct. When qualms or emotional impulses clouded her vision, she found *"guidance in the simple and incontestable words of the Gospel"*.<sup>217</sup>

She desired *"to maintain her joy through inner faithfulness to Jesus Christ and to trust in him"*, to better appreciate *"the great treasure"* she had in him,<sup>218</sup> to *"carry the likeness of the Man-God..."*<sup>219</sup> who was the model presiding over the creation of humanity.<sup>220</sup>

With her sense of realism, she considered that *"it was up to Him [God] to create within us the likeness of Jesus Christ"*<sup>221</sup> throughout our existence, as this was not possible for a human being alone:<sup>222</sup> *"no creature may wholly trace the divine ideal..."*<sup>223</sup> For her, the calling of people and especially the religious calling, was a constant path to this likeness.<sup>224</sup>

■ **221** Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, Third Sunday of Advent, no date  
 ■ **222** Cf. Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1871  
 ■ **223** Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1890  
 ■ **224** Cf. Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1883

She also often pointed out that God lived in human beings, who should radiate this hidden presence within themselves and leave its mark.<sup>225</sup>

On a path that proceeds from imitation to union by means of contemplation, we are like painters who must give all their attention to observing the model in order to become “another Jesus Christ”.<sup>226</sup>

She often returned to the idea that God delights in everyone,<sup>227</sup> that he exists in the depths of the soul “like the sun that shines through a crystal”,<sup>228</sup> and his rays must penetrate her without being veiled.

She recalled on several occasions the image of the candle, the wax of humanity and that of God mixing to become one.<sup>229</sup> Spiritual life was union with God in his Son Jesus Christ, opening her up to a process of perpetual transformation: “I feel the need to wholly renew myself.”<sup>230</sup>

*« If, when creating a picture, the sister who paints were to look up in the air instead of looking at her model, if she were only to look from afar and in a vague and general way, she would create no likeness of her model. Similarly, in order to know our Lord and to create his divine likeness in ourselves, we must move closer to him and devote ourselves to him... »*

Marie Eugénie  
Chapter Instruction, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1877

Marie Eugénie’s path to holiness emerged through this desire for the likeness to Christ that would transfigure her humanity. Her soul, marked by strength, perseverance, and entrepreneurial boldness, but also by curiosity, sensitivity and the awareness of her limits, would find its final destination in this project at the end of her life: “I now have nothing to do but to be good.”<sup>231</sup>



■ 225 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Letter to Father d’Alzon, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1842, Letter 1561  
■ 226 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1873  
■ 227 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1889:  
“There is no tabernacle as pleasing to God as the human soul.”

■ 228 Marie Eugénie, Chapter Instruction, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1879  
■ 229 Cf. Marie Eugénie, Chapter instruction, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1872  
■ 230 Marie Eugénie, Notes Intimes, No. 227/01, Great retreat 1867

■ 231 Cf. Origines de l’Assomption IV (Ed. 1902), p. 501





### *An ongoing work*

During the General Chapter of 1894, a decisive moment in its own history and that of the Congregation, Marie Eugénie declared her desire – “in the fullness of her light and wisdom”, according to Sister Marie Marguerite – to have a General Vicar to support her, in addition to entrusting her with the burden she had been carrying for 55 years: “I am old; the years are weighing on me. I need to have a Mother close to me to help me.”

Father Odelin, President of the Chapter, encouraged her to use this well-deserved rest to “impart the finishing touches to the work that God had entrusted to her”, her sole remaining role being that “of loving his daughters”. Sister Marie Marguerite, the Assistant General for Sister Marie Célestine, who was elected Vicar, wrote to the Congregation on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1894, emphasizing the union: “The single and ever fervent desire for good that unites the Chapter members ... is to strengthen the future of the Assumption by remaining faithful to its past.”

Four years later, on 10th March 1898, Marie Eugénie took her last breath after a long road of renunciation. When Marie Célestine convened the General Chapter, she wrote: “We can never replace a Foundress, but only a successor to continue the work she left behind her. Such must have been the feelings of the Apostles and Disciples called to nominate a successor to Saint Peter, the head given by Jesus Christ himself to his Church ... Also for us, we have the sweet confidence that Our Mother, this Foundress chosen by Our Lord for our Congregation, will live through all those who shall be called to govern us...”<sup>232</sup>

■ 232 Partage Auteuil, No. 34, pp. 39-43

Who was the helmsman over the course of these sixty years? We could say that there were two, our two Mothers, or that they let themselves be guided by a single helmsman, He who is at once the Vessel, the Goal and the Compass.

It was to both sisters and to Christ Himself that Thérèse Emmanuel paid tribute when she wrote, in one of her instructions to the novices: “The helmsman who guides a vessel always keeps his eyes on the compass in order to steer the ship. He does not mind the clouds or the wind but directs his whole attention to maintaining the right direction in order to reach the end of the journey, as the lives of every passenger depend on his navigation of the ship. If we desire to reach heaven, we must have a firm intention to steer everything towards this goal and to make everything that we do work for our sanctification.”<sup>233</sup>



■ 233 Thérèse Emmanuel, Instructions to the novices, Vol. 1, p. 207



# Glossary

## *Abbaye aux Bois*

Convent of the Canonesses of Saint Augustine. An important site for literary events. Mme. Récamier had a salon there and received visits from Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Balzac.

## *Monsignor Denis Auguste Affre (1793-1848)*

Vicar General of Paris at the time of the foundation. He became Archbishop of Paris and gave the habit to the first sisters on 14th August 1840. He was killed by gunfire while attempting to reconcile adversaries during the Revolution of 1848.

## *Father Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-1880)*

Priest in 1834. Vicar General at Nîmes in 1835. Founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption in 1845 and the Oblates of the Assumption in 1865. In 1841, he became counsellor to Marie Eugénie and then her spiritual director. Their correspondence is a precious witness to the history of our Congregation.

## *Animadversiones*

Latin term designating the remarks made by Roman authorities regarding the Constitutions of the Congregation in view of their approval.

## *François René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848)*

French writer and politician. In 1802, he published *The Genius of Christianity* and *René*, two important works for the development of Romanticism.

## *Abbé Théodore Combalot (1797-1873)*

Priest in 1820. Disciple of Lamennais, from whom he separated when Lamennais was condemned. After a pilgrimage to Saint Anne d'Auray in 1825, he felt called to found a religious order. He made an initial unsuccessful attempt with two of his sisters.

## *Monseigneur Jean Alexis Gaume (1797-1869)*

Friend of Father Combalot. Confessor of Anne Eugénie at the Benedictines of the Blessed Sacrament (1837-1838). Ecclesiastical Superior for the Congregation after Abbé Gros, from 1843 to 1849. He received the perpetual vows of the first sisters.

## *Félicité de Genlis (1746-1830)*

A prominent writer, she was responsible for the education of the future King Louis-Philippe. She wrote more than 80 historical works.

## *Abbé Jean Nicaise Gros (1794-1857)*

Vicar General of Paris under Monsignor Affre. Ecclesiastical superior of the Religious of the Assumption from 1841 to 1843, after the departure of Father Combalot. Bishop of Versailles from 1844.

## *Father Henri Dominique Lacordaire (1802-1861)*

Disciple of Lamennais (from whom he separated before his condemnation) and his collaborator at the newspaper *L'Avenir*. Ordained priest in 1827, he received the Dominican habit in April 1839, in Rome. Afterwards, he reestablished the Order of Preachers in France. After their first meeting in 1836, Marie Eugénie maintained a relationship with him, sometimes distancing herself from his ideas on religious life.

Text: Sister Cathy Jones, Sister Katrin Goris, Sister Véronique Thiébaud, Religious of the Assumption

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