

Anthropological Foundations of the Assumption Philosophy of Education

Mother Marie Eugenie and the Assumption Project Today

A Philosophy, a passion, a strong and tempered character (M .M.Eugenie, 1844)

I would like to present the ideas of Mother Marie Eugenie by keeping close to her terms and expressions but, at the same time, explaining them and casting them in concepts and vocabulary that are more understandable for our times. Sometimes I shall take the liberty of modernizing them. I think that this approach is what I do best. In such a limited time, I can only give some key concepts – in terms that will be immediately comprehensible, I hope, even for those who are not already familiar with Mother Marie Eugenie’s philosophy of education.

The anthropology of the Assumption is a theological anthropology. It is founded on and inspired by a Biblical and Christian doctrine. Its most fundamental concepts are the same as those of Christianity: the person created in God’s image and Christ, the God-Man, perfect image of God and prototype of the human race. This is the pure and simple teaching of the Catholic faith that we get from the Bible – principally from Genesis and from St. Paul, -- and also from the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

Before going any further, it is important to note that Marie Eugenie had a horror for strange or exotic ideas; she did not seek to be original. She always claimed to be simply nothing but Catholic in her teaching. She also wanted to be eminently practical, seeking to lay down what Catholic doctrine meant for our lives. Thus, she worked out what she called the “consequences” of the Gospel in her teaching of spirituality as well as in her project of education. This way of understanding the Christian faith was her gift and perhaps her originality. In any case, this is one of the fundamental characteristics of Marie Eugenie: a rigorous coherence, an implacable logic that starts with some basic principles of the Faith and draws from them concrete and practical consequences – on one hand, a broad vision of society and the world; and on the other, a coming down to the most common realities of daily life.

Many Christians today seem to live in two worlds: one secular, the other spiritual. In their spiritual world, they read the Gospel, love God and give themselves in dedicated service to their neighbor. In the secular world, they try to be good and honest, but they do not know how to translate their faith into the words and actions that make up their daily lives. They use a double language: they have one way of speaking to talk about the stock exchange and unemployment, television and juvenile delinquency; and another one to talk about Christ and the Cross, about suffering and trust in divine providence, about prayer and discernment. They have secular relationships and spiritual friends to whom they speak their different languages. Their speaking two languages shows that they have two different modes of thinking, of being and of operating in one and the same world. In the business world they can enter into sharp competition and they can lay off employees; at the same time in their religious life, they speak of Jesus gentle and humble of heart and care for the poor. Their life becomes rather schizophrenic and their two

worlds cannot meet. Such a separation, however, is contrary to all that we believe, for we know that our faith is concerned directly with life in the world. Our faith is supposed to modify our way of looking at the world, our way of understanding life in the world and our way of living it. Our holiness and integrity as human being should be achieved in our work and in our social life as well as in the Church and in prayer. All the educational evangelizing efforts of Marie Eugenie aimed at this unification.

Let us start with a fundamental idea of our faith – that the human being has been created in God’s image. The human person is gifted with free will and intelligence, has the capacity to love and to create. Moreover, each person has been created as a “you” for God; a subject called to exist in relationship and in dialogue with God. God created everything through His word, but only the human being can respond and give God the response of creation. For the created person then, God is also a “You.” God ceaselessly calls the entire human race and each individual to a relationship of communion. The human being is a capacity for God, destined to eternal life in (with) the Trinity. This vision of the human person as an image of God is one of the greatest revelations of our faith. It is also essentially positive and dynamic.

Perhaps it is useful to say a few words about the God of Marie Eugenie. The God of Marie Eugenie is Goodness and Love; her God is by definition total self-giving or gift. God’s auto-communication is a loving presence at every moment of our existence; it is a continuously creative activity. It makes us capable of knowing, loving and creating like God. The god who calls us to life in this way also cares for our life and wants to live in loving communion with us. This is the meaning of God as Father. We can count on this Father to turn all the events of our existence into good, our good.

The insistence on our creaturehood is a strong accent in Marie Eugenie. As creatures we depend on God at each moment of our existence. She shows us an attitude of dependence which, far from being an alienation or a servitude, is a joyful welcome. Our being creatures is a source of joy and confidence because it is an immense love that brought us to life, that keeps us alive and that guides us. The conviction that we are loved, guided, protected, sustained, constantly renews and energizes us. Dependence on God liberates us from anguish and slavery to the world.¹ Christ leads us into a fullness of freedom (Gal.5, 1) and with freedom comes Lordship (1 Col 3: 22-23).

An idea connected with that of our being creatures is the devotion of Marie Eugenie to what she calls the “Rights of God.” As creatures, we have the duty to love² and believe in God. But not as slaves, nor even in gratitude, but because God merits this love in an ontological way, by the simple fact that God is infinitely lovable and infinitely worthy of faith. The reason for loving God is because God is God. Because God is Love, the source of love in us and of our capacity to love. Likewise, the reason for believing in God is because God is God, absolute Truth. Marie Eugenie goes even further when she

¹ Letter to Fr. d’Alzon, July 19, 1842, No.1556 “...I would like, before God, that instead of so many facilities and exceptions, we were given a little more help to arrive at that total dependence on Jesus Christ which ought to be the secret chain of our exterior liberty...”

² We should adore God. For M.Eugenie, adoration is the highest form and most total love of which the human being is capable.

suggests that adoration of God and total trust in God are, for us creatures, plenitude and supreme happiness. The perfect example of this dependence and all-loving response is found in the faith and love manifested by the Son of God, Jesus Christ. His resurrection and glorification are the proof that his way leads to our total fulfillment.

The Assumption anthropology is, like the Catholic Faith, entirely Christocentric, founded and centered on Christ not only as Son of God, but also as perfect image of God – and perfect image of Man. Jesus radiates the invisible glory of God. He reveals the heart and the truth of God. At the same time, as the first-born of all creation, He is the prototype of the human race and the human person.

The Word of God was already present at Creation. Then at a given moment in human history, when God took flesh and human form in Jesus Christ (the Incarnation), he assumed or took on all of humanity and all of human history. We are called to become fully human in the image of Christ, to reproduce the image of Christ. Each one will be a unique image. Our own bodies will be gloriously transfigured as Christ's was in his resurrection. For us, henceforth, there is no life other than a life with God. For us, there is no life that is not "in Christ." This is the great and essential mystery of Christianity. According to St. Paul, however, we can choose to live either in Adam (a carnal, worldly or purely natural life) and die in Christ and enjoy eternal life.

Christian theology teaches us, moreover, that Christ is the perfect "yes" to the Father. He came to the world to return the world and all creation to God. Everything has been reconciled with God in Christ and everything will be "recapitulated" in Him – according to the Pauline expression – meaning that all of creation, all things, will find their head, their unity, their coherence and consistency, their ultimate meaning and their destiny in the mystery of Christ. By virtue of His Incarnation and His Passover (the Paschal mystery – his birth, public life and death, his resurrection and glorification--Christ can bring back all of creation to its Creator and "God will be all in all."³ In this way, Jesus Christ has become King and the Universe his Kingdom. Through the mystery of his life with us and in us the Kingdom of God is established in the world and will be brought to its full realization.

This is God's plan for the individual person and for society: "God in you",⁴ a long-hidden mystery, but revealed in our times, that is, in our Christian era. This doctrine is the fruit of the reflection of the apostles and of Paul, after they had experienced Christ. It is given to us in Scriptures and in the life of the Church.

Here we have a genuine spiritual way, the path of salvation. The Incarnation of the Word in Christ is the definitive "yes" of God to the world and to history; they have been assumed by (united to) the humanity of the Word for all eternity. Our entire human reality has become christified and Christ is at the heart of all that we live. Our planet earth is not just the *locus* (place) where history unfolds; it, too, is drawn into the mystery of Christ (Romans 8) and through human mediation, is called to the communion of destiny where God will be all in all things.⁵

³ 1 Corinthians 15: 28

⁴ Col 1: 26-27

⁵ Cf, Juan L. Ruiz de la Pena, *Imagen de Dios*. Sal Terrae, Santander 1988

It is this sublime doctrine about humanity, about the world and God⁶ that Marie Eugenie wanted to translate and render operative in her pedagogy. She wanted not only to teach this doctrine but also to collaborate in its concretization in history (in our lives, in society, in history). She was possessed by an urgency to teach it in terms understandable to her audience, in a language that took into account the mentality of her contemporaries as well as the developments of thought and science.

Having expressed these fundamental ideas, I want to continue by highlighting some points which I believe are particularly important for the Assumption today.

A person is a human being in the **process of becoming**. Created by God, not in a single stroke, but in a continual process of creation requiring an active participation on the person's part. Each one is called to be a co-creator with God working out in his history his/her own salvation and personal destiny. This takes time and requires patience! Moreover, our life in Christ is a redeemed life, in the sense that each person came into the world, not just unfinished, but already marked by sin. The newborn babe enters into a world marked by sin. Every sin has its repercussions. In some way it disfigures the whole of creation. The sins of parents shall fall on their children up to the fourth generation, we read in the Old Testament.⁷ It is a fact, not a condemnation; that's the way it is. We have all observed it and experienced it in our lives. Fortunately, there is a second part to this scriptural passage: The good that they do will mark their descendants for thousands of generations.⁸ In our times, the time of salvation, the grace of the Spirit has been communicated to us in a radically new and even deeper way through the work of Christ. We are no longer slaves neither of sin nor of the Law, but children of the spirit, brought to maturity from within by the Spirit. Sin shall not prevail. This is an optimistic and reassuring view of history, coming not from an optimistic temperament but from a view of faith.

Very often, what strikes people in Marie Eugenie is her humanity. What does this mean? On one hand, it is her goodness, her understanding of human nature, her compassion; on the other hand, it is her way of accepting human nature as it is and the fact that she wants to work with this human nature, the substance of our being, instead of working with what is only external and superficial. In education, Marie Eugenie emphasizes the importance of our **human nature** and the human virtues. As a matter of

⁶ "What superiority would not be achieved if these three elements of life (philosophy, passion, character) were taken from the source of life and not from broken cisterns as the prophet says; if we steep characters in the Gospel, if we make souls burn for the truth of god and His Reign, if the Wisdom revealed by the very Son of God and the science of the relationship of all beings with Him become the philosophy, the principle and the end of our Studies?... May God deign to send someone who teaches science and Christian education by uniting one to the other, making them support each other..." M.M.E. Letter No. 1627, Aug.5, 1844)

⁷ Deut. 7: 9-10

⁸ Exodus 20: 5-6

fact, it is impossible to talk about the anthropology of the Assumption without talking about what Marie Eugenie considers as a specific trait of the spirit of the Assumption: the attention given to the **natural or human virtues**.⁹ St. Paul makes reference to these human virtues in his letter to the Philippians: “Finally, brothers, your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous or worthy of praise (in your education and culture)” (Phil. 2: 8)

A virtue is a habit, a disposition which allows us to act (to do good or to be good) with a certain ease and constancy even in the face of adversity. The expression “natural” or human “virtues” refers to those virtues (sometimes called “values” today) which are rooted in human nature, which allow it to develop, which make us morally sound, “good human beings.” They bring character to its perfection and defend it against evil tendencies as well as against the domination of passions or instincts. The effort to cultivate these virtues implies the desire to grow, energy, and the will to transcend oneself.

Marie Eugenie gives us a long list of natural virtues – frankness, straightforwardness, delicacy, simplicity, honor¹⁰ - and above all, kindness, without which, she says, one cannot live at the Assumption nor claim to be of the Assumption! These virtues which are often found in people who do not share our faith and in those who declare they haven’t any religious faith, give glory to God in an impressive way. They also constitute the necessary foundation of any authentic spiritual life. The natural virtues of “pagans” can make them far more attractive and convincing than pious “practicing” Christians who lack these fundamental virtues! For Marie Eugenie this is not only sad, but scandalous.

Naturally, all education worthy of its name will value these virtues and will put them forward. But the relative attention that one gives to them makes all the difference. For example, if the accent is placed on discipline and order, good behavior can take precedence in a school and will effectively come first. Students will get the message, for instance, that outward conformity to rules of discipline is more important than being sincerely kind and helpful to fellow students. Pious practices, prayers and devotions can even be more important in an educational system than the acquisition of virtues just because those practices are constantly emphasized as the means to being good and doing the right thing. Going to Mass can be considered to make one “holy” while gossip and back-biting are serenely tolerated. A sincere church-goer who does not speak the truth or is irresponsible betrays the cause of Christ.

Another dominant idea of Marie Eugenie is that of **vocation**: each person has been created and called to occupy a particular place in God’s plan.¹¹

Each person possesses natural and supernatural gifts – all the aptitudes necessary to accomplish his/her vocation. Although this can have a fatalistic accent, it is also a source of extraordinary strength, as we see in so many biblical personages. No matter how humble and difficult it may be, our role and work in society is part of a marvelous

⁹ Chapter on the Spirit of the Assumption: May 26, 1878

¹⁰ Note how the list reflects the times and culture of Marie Eugenie

¹¹ Letter to Emmanuel d’Alzon, August 28, 1844, No. 1630

plan for us and for the world. We know that our place is unique and that Another is with us to help us. Each one is invited to grow and develop in order to give even beyond what the particular person may believe he/she is capable of. We grow, bloom and find peace as we live out our vocation.

Many people notice that there is a great **freedom of spirit** at the Assumption. The essential freedom for each person is to have the capacity to actualize his/her potential, to give oneself in service to others, to shape his/her own destiny. That means that it is my responsibility to become what I am meant to be and this freedom gives me the capacity to be myself, to achieve my identity. (Of course, it always consists in a “situated” freedom, and of a liberty that must grow into freedom). The freedom of spirit in the Assumption is founded on a great respect for this freedom given by God, on a climate that encourages and even pushes a person to be him/herself, to build her/himself. It flourishes in an atmosphere where there is a minimum of rules and constraints which can break a person’s *élan*. Freedom of spirit comes from a basic trust in people; from energy and enthusiasm in the effort to become oneself, to realize one’s potential. It is at the origin of a personal project and also accompanies its realization.

In the same line, Mother Marie Eugenie believed in what she called the “distinguishing characteristics of each one’s grace,” the **particular traits and gifts of the individual person**. She thought that students should be left free to be themselves. It was important for her that students have space and liberty to show themselves as they really are. They had to reveal themselves, be themselves, in order to develop. She also urged young people to follow the attractions of their nature and insisted that teachers encourage them to fly on their own. Authority’s role is only to assure safety, to prevent a too great accident, like the net which prevents the acrobats from hitting the ground.¹²

In the area of faith, both Marie Eugenie and Therese Emmanuel reacted against the abuse of authority, a lack of respect for the intelligence and the conscience of the individual. They had encountered authorities who taught that they should believe against their reason, without their reason. Doubts and questions were not to be taken seriously. Neither were they given the freedom to pursue their personal search in the area of faith. They experienced in their own flesh the danger that this attitude can be for the mind and the person as well as for the faith. Their experience gave them the conviction that their religious beliefs could transcend reason but not oppose it. They both had experienced doubt but also joy in the gift of faith. Thus, the two foundresses were led to envisage an education inspired by faith but also in harmony with reason (science).

There is a presupposition in the Assumption that human beings are intelligent. Surely there are different types and degrees of intelligence, but the average human being is gifted with intellectual capacity. **Intelligence** means ability to reflect, to judge, to discern. The human mind can pass from experience to understanding; from there, it can test its understanding, judge it, form opinions and convictions. The development of this intelligence is what we seek in Assumption education. To know a lot of things is the work of curiosity and of the memory but it has little to do with real intelligence (though it can be helpful for the intelligence). Computers can store reams of facts, and do so better than the human mind. They can put these at our disposition with an extraordinary speed,

¹² Letter to Emmanuel d’Alzon, August 5, 1844, No. 1627

perform in hours operations that the human mind cannot finish in years. But they are not intelligent.

Bernard Lonergan, a Canadian Jesuit philosopher, insists in his works, on the importance for Christians of intellectual conversion.¹³ There is a religious conversion through which one comes to know God and love him above all things, a moral conversion through which one chooses the good over one's own pleasure and comfort, and also an intellectual conversion. Intellectual conversion consists in seeking to understand for ourselves how our souls function and how they can function as a source for the greatest human achievements, or as a source for the greatest tragedies. He insists that to understand how human beings think and how their thinking leads them to make decisions and to act can be as vital for us and for society as religious fervor and generosity are. Do we not encounter an unreflected (unintelligent) fervor and generosity in the fundamentalism which today threatens world peace? It is perhaps the greatest treason to do the right thing for the wrong reason, but it can be disastrous to do the wrong thing for the right reason.

It might be useful to mention here that **faith** is a dimension or capacity of the intelligence and can be seen as an aspect of the intellectual process. We are not always aware of it, but a kind of faith functions all throughout the day and everyday in our daily life. As individuals, we know almost nothing without faith. Indeed, we are constantly called to trust what others say – each time we buy a product or listen to the news, cross the street at the green light or take an aspirin.

Judgment enters into this process, though we are usually conscious of this only in the case of our weighty convictions and decisions. For instance, we can judge if the source is worthy of faith; we can also judge the value of the content (what we take on faith). It is interesting to note that faith functions in the exact opposite to the ordinary way of knowing, because it moves from judgment to understanding, and then to experience. I take something on faith; by reflection and judgment I understand it; I check it against experience (see if my experience bears out or contradicts its truth).

Religious faith enables us to go beyond reason, to complete or “perfect” our intelligence. It is a normal part of the human approach to reality. It is, moreover, the dominant note of the Assumption way. In education, the Assumption aims at what Marie Eugenie calls the “Christianization of the intelligence”¹⁴ This means that the intelligence allows itself to be enlightened, illumined, guided and formed by faith. Lonergan describes religious faith as “the eye of love” and defines it as a judgment of value born of religious love. Faith looks for and welcomes God as a *You*, transcendent of nature and of history. It enables us to contemplate the rising sun with joy and thanks giving. It allows us to read history in such a way that we marvel at what God has done for humanity – and for me. It helps us discern in the propositions of the Gospel, something worth giving oneself to. Faith discerns the transcendent value of our daily activities. Finally, faith makes us see everything in the light of one sole question: what is its transcendent value? To have the

¹³ Tad Dunne, S.J., *Lonergan and Spirituality*, Dutton, Chicago: 1985, p. 10

¹⁴ An expression we keep in the Assumption which is not readily acceptable today. It gives the impression that one does something to the intelligence of the other, while we only want to teach the habit of considering everything in the light of faith.)

habit of habitually discerning what is of transcendent value is to have a living faith.¹⁵ Marie Eugenie made the effort to see reality in the light of eternity, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God, the constant and continual preoccupation of Assumption education. She wants this attitude of faith to become as spontaneous for us as breathing. It can be taught and is learned best from models rather than from prescriptions.

St. Augustine is, at the Assumption, the model of a “Christianized” intelligence. This man, an ardent intellectual lover, sought all through his life to deepen his understanding of the Word of God. At the same time, he sought relentlessly to understand his own life – life and history – in the light of the Word. He was in love with Truth, in perpetual search for transcendent, immutable and eternal Truth. Truth which is ever-present comes to humans only in instants. One has to live it, moreover, in order to have real access to it. It is life and freedom for the soul.¹⁶

All that I have said makes it clear that our approach is more **theological** than moral. The human being created *ad Deum* (oriented towards God according to Augustine’s expression) does not strive simply to obey divine injunctions through the effort of the will, but rather allows itself to be drawn by what faith discerns as transcendent Good, transcendent Truth and transcendent Beauty. In cultivating the attraction for the good, the beautiful, the true, one comes to love virtue for itself, to desire it. Virtue is not practiced primarily by obligation, nor necessity, nor by duty; it is practiced by desire and love. Moreover, in loving the good, the beautiful and the true, one becomes authentic, lovable and beautiful. This is the context of the famous dictum where the moral life is very simple according to St. Augustine: *Ama et quod vis fac.* (Love and do what you will.)

Having said so much about the intelligence, I feel that there would be an imbalance if I did not give some space to **Love**: to loving and being loved. Love is the underlying reality, omnipresent in all that I have said about the Assumption “anthropology.” God whom Marie Eugenie described as Goodness, and goodness that pours itself out as a gift is perfect, absolute love, without any lack or imperfection. The human being comes from the hand of God, is born of Love and is called to go back to Love by way of love. The person’s growth, his fulfillment, his wellbeing reside principally in the acceptance and the gift of love. We need to love and to be loved.

We experience transcendent Love in our aspirations, in our fundamental questions, in our wonder. That Love exercises a permanent attraction; it is the desire hidden beneath each desire. God loved us first. And when we love, we love through God’s gift in us.

“Charity,” said Marie Eugenie in the first Constitutions or Rule of the Assumption, “is love born of God, by which we love one another with the very love with which God loves us, and for the same end: their sanctity in this world and their eternal happiness in the next. This is not a natural love but a devoted love, a true love which, not founded on what is pleasing, makes us seek in this world all that is good and useful for the creatures to whom this love attaches us.” Note that love “attaches” us to others. It is a tendency

¹⁵ Dunne, *op.cit.* p. 118-120

¹⁶ Maurice Zundel, cf. Marc Donze, *La pensée théologique de Maurice Zundel*, Geneva: Cerf-Tricorne, 1980, pp. 61-80

towards communion. Love finds its satisfaction and joy in the other, in the other's happiness or good. Charity or love is also expressed in admiration, attentiveness, and oblation.

Love then, is a dynamic force in us that seeks to attain the highest good for ourselves and for those whom we love. It draws us out of the prison of the ego where we risk enclosing ourselves; it leads us to go beyond ourselves. Moral conversion which commits us to transcendent values requires us to go beyond ourselves; and many people do strive for this ideal. But to be good is not sufficient for us, we are happiest when we are good for someone. That someone can be our family or a friend; for us Christians, that someone is God.

Charity also leads us out of the little sphere of our family and friends. It always has a bigger dimension, the **social dimension**. The human being cannot grow and develop without other human beings. In the measure that a child experiences love and grows in the family, he/she starts going out into **society**. Interaction with others, with society, is necessary to complete the "humanization" and the formation of the person. Enriching contacts make rich personalities. Interaction implies that the individual receives from society and gives to it in return. A person's value can be judged by his contribution to society, by his influence on the milieu.¹⁷

Society itself is an organism that, like the individual, needs to grow and to evolve. Just as the person needs to receive from society, society needs to feed itself and to renew itself continually through interaction with its members. Individuals cannot simply be parasites who live on the group but they have to participate actively in the life of the society constantly bringing it the nourishment that will enable it to pursue its vital function vis-a-vis individuals and the group. Even before her conversion, Marie Eugenie considered the human being, not just as an individual but as part of a whole, and of a whole for which one is responsible. She could not conceive of an existence or a salvation that would be occupied only with the individual's life. Thus, after her conversion, the gospel was not a guide for her that concerned only her individual salvation. To be confined to one's own little self and to one's small circle of family and friends was, for her, to be condemned to the misery of egoism. She read in the gospel what she called "social consequences."¹⁸ Human beings are called to contribute to the happiness of all, to the upbuilding of the country, to the transformation of structures...

What is more, the human being is not simply placed in the world; but is, on the contrary, linked or connected to the world in a dynamic and active way. People live in osmosis with the environment: the indispensable air, light and water of daily existence, but also with the trees and animals, the resources of Mother Nature. It is for this reason that the destinies of humanity and of the earth are tied to each other and that our world is touched by the grace of the Incarnation. For this same reason, it will participate in the Resurrection. In the Biblical account of Creation (*Genesis* again), God made Adam master over all living things on earth. He gave him power to name animals and to "subdue" the earth. The human being has been constituted the high priest and lord of Creation. But this

¹⁷ Juan L. Ruiz, *op.cit.*, p. 205

¹⁸ Letters to Emmanuel d'Alzon, No. 1610, March 12, 1844, "the earthly consequences of the Redemption," and No. 1648, date uncertain, probably 1844.

lordship implies the responsibility to take care of the social and ecological order. It is our task to promote the harmony and well-being of the planet given to us but also entrusted to us.¹⁹

All living creatures on earth share the same origin; all are formed from the earth and exist only in interdependence with each other. Sin, however, destroyed not only the harmonious relationship between God and humankind, between human beings, but also the harmonious relationship between humanity and its environment. Today we are more aware of the effects of this disorder and of the urgency to restore the necessary order for the survival of our planet as well as of its inhabitants. For the first time in human history we can imagine that the earth could suffer a destruction for which human beings, themselves, would be guilty. We realize today that human lordship over nature is not an absolute authority. God alone is Lord, we are mere stewards. As stewards we must assume a greater responsibility than ever before.

A basic human characteristic related to the image of God in man is creativity. **Work** is necessary for the person's growth and development. At the same time it is a divine command. Human work prolongs and perfects God's work. It is collaboration with the Creator. That is why work, even the humblest work, has value. Each one has something to do in this world; each one has a work to do.²⁰

We have talents to develop. These talents were given to us for the world, for the Kingdom, for the glory of God.²¹ The prodigious scientific and technological advances of the twentieth century show how humanity continues the creative action of God in the world. As long as man in his pride does not allow himself to be carried away and dominated by his exploits or use them to evil purposes. The danger recounted in the history of the tower of Babel awaits us in ever new ways.

Marie Eugenie's passion for the Kingdom was rooted in her conviction that there is no such thing as a secular history animated by progress separated from another "sacred" history animated by grace. Progress and grace are inseparably co-mingled in a unique history and move towards the same end. We are encouraged to see a basic continuity between the development that builds up the earthly city and the Kingdom of God (City of God). Eschatological hope in the coming of the Kingdom should not hinder our efforts to render our world more perfect; on the contrary, hope should animate our efforts. The Christian should give a paschal dimension to human activity.²²

Marie Eugenie also sees an existential link between "God's Reign in us and the Reign of God in the world." Between the order of our souls (the interior life) and the order of the world there is an existential link. The health of society can never be detached from the health of individuals: their beliefs and their values, their commitments and their failures. The soul has its laws and ways of functioning just as the body has. Its workings

¹⁹ This ecological note will not be found in Marie Eugenie's thought and writings, but it is utterly in keeping with her vision of the role of the Incarnation.

²⁰ "... we have also a body, a mission to accomplish, faculties to exercise, and something to do in this world." M.M.Eugenie, Chapter of March 24, 1878

²¹ Marie Eugenie tells us that developing one's talents is a way of adoring God. Chapters of Feb. 24 and March 25, 1878

²² Olivier Clement, quoted by Juan L. Ruiz, op.cit., p. 227

have the power to put order or chaos in society, just as it can do in the individual.²³ To work for the Kingdom of God or good order in self is already a way of extending the Kingdom in society. To understand how to discern the decisions we should take so that God will reign in us individually is to understand how we can make good decisions so that God may reign in society. And also to understand how fragile our will is and how easily evil can reign in us and in the world.²⁴

Historically speaking, girls were the first beneficiaries of Assumption education. The initial project of the first Assumption Sisters and their first school was conceived in view of woman's role in society, the role of "the other half of the population." The project aimed not only to give young girls an education parallel to that given to boys, but above all, to educate them to make the most of the place given to them in their milieu. We could hardly call Marie Eugenie a feminist, but she was convinced that women had to wake up to their potential and their duties in society. She was less preoccupied with woman's equality on the political and social levels than she was with woman's specific action and contribution to society.²⁵ She does not state it outright but it is clear that Marie Eugenie rejected the fashionable view of women as the weaker sex and inferior to men, without a role to play in society. She underlined differences between men and women and saw a complementarity between them. At the same time it is easy to imagine that she who dreamt of a "social state where no man would have to suffer any other fatality than that of nature; in other words, where the Christian principle would strive to save each individual from oppression by the others"²⁶ would espouse the cause of woman's liberation. We know that women's dignity as persons is not recognized in many of the countries of our contemporary world, neither do many women enjoy the simplest forms of freedom. This cannot be the will of God.

It is interesting to note that some exegetes, in interpreting the text of Genesis "man and woman He created them...to the image of God," treat the first couple as a "binary" form, "two in one same flesh."²⁷ Rather than as individuals, they are together in their relationship as a couple an image of the Trinitarian God. There is unity, difference and equality. The oppressive male domination and the lack of respect for women's human rights which characterize so many societies and cultures today are certainly consequences of sin. The predominance of the masculine way of being and of doing with the absence of space and esteem for feminine qualities and ways of doing in almost all cultures – upheld, moreover, by certain religions – has as its least damaging effect the impoverishment of the culture. In some cases, we can say that the unfair treatment of women vitiates the culture.

For us Christians, **Mary** is a prototype for woman as well as for all humans as creature, for she is fully creature and purely human like us. Because of her unique and intimate participation in the mystery of Christ, we can contemplate in her the capacities of

²³ The interior life has its laws and functions, capable of putting order or creating chaos in society as well as in the person. Lonergan in Dunne, op. cit., p.

²⁴ "Thus the search for order which constitutes the meaning of the human being appears simultaneously as a search for a well-ordered soul within a well-ordered civilization. We can't have one without the other... The order of the interior life and that of society have the same foundations." Dunne, op.cit, p.2

²⁵ For example, Letter to Emmanuel d'Alzon No. 1556, July 19, 1842

²⁶ Marie Eugenie to Emmanuel d'Alzon, Letter No. 1610, March 12, 1844

²⁷ Frederic Marliere, *Who Told you that You were Naked?*, Quebec: Sigier, 1992, p. 38

our nature, its openness to God and its destiny in Christ. Her motherhood supposes a radically interpersonal relationship with Jesus, a relationship that “completes” and transforms her. For Marie Eugenie, she is the creature the most “clothed in Christ.”²⁸ She is also the figure of the new Eve, the woman of the new creation in Christ, “a woman regenerated by the grace of Christ.”²⁹ Her Assumption is the coronation of Jesus’ presence in her. “All our hope and all the secret of our greatness lie in Jesus and Mary.”³⁰

As anthropology and anthropology for the Assumption today, this remains a very incomplete study. I gave myself two limitations: the explicit ideas of Marie Eugenie and my own experience of the philosophy and pedagogy of the Assumption. Sometimes I feared that I let anthropology overflow into the realm of psychology or into other disciplines. But I allowed myself these transgressions in order to spell out certain important points for the Assumption. Finally, in my desire to be brief and concise, I avoided long explanations, perhaps risking ambiguity or lack of clarity. There remains also the need to take up other questions essential to modern anthropology. We need, above all, to show how the idea of the human being in our contemporary cultures and societies is in opposition to the vision presented above and should be denounced by both content of our teaching and by our methods.

Sister Clare Teresa, r.a.
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²⁸ “Mary...the most human and the most clothed in the life of Jesus Christ”, Letter to Fr. d’Alzon, August 1853, No. 1590. See also, Letter to Fr. d’Alzon, Sept. 12, 1843 No. 1592 “the spirit of being clothed in J.C. in the intellectual order.

²⁹ Abbe Theodore Combalot, “Introduction to the Constitutions of the Religious of the Assumption”, p. 22

³⁰ Maurice Zundel in March Donze, *Witness to a Presence: Unedited texts of Maurice Zundel*, Vol.II, Geneva: Tricorne, 1987, p. 74