



J.M.V.

Who are we?

Where do we come from?

A few highlights from our history

Here is the main outline of the Association of "Children of Mary Immaculate" up until the year 1980 or thereabouts.

They were written by **Mr Dinnat**, a great admirer of Blessed **Sister Rosalie RENDU**.

Having read a book on Sister Rosalie, he developed a desire to continue his historical research in the Vincentian Family, and agreed to throw himself wholeheartedly into the study of the archives of the Association.

In this way, he has made it possible for us to offer this document to the members of the International General Assembly which is to take place in Paris from 7th to 13th August 2005. By means of this document they will have a better knowledge of the origins of the Association.

Our most sincere thanks go out to Mr Dinnat.

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Children of Mary



Origins

Catherine Labouré

Let us think back to the nineteenth century, when the Virgin Mary appeared to a humble novice of the Daughters of Charity. Her name was Catherine Labouré (1806-1876).

The period from 1815 to 1871 was the golden age of unrestrained capitalism in France and also a time of great distress. Money was all important. The life of the women workers was extremely hard. There were practically no social policies in place. By sending Mary to this young woman (Catherine was then 24 years old) God took a stand against misery, against the injustice generated by a society in which people's only interest was material happiness, leaving behind a huge crowd of poor wretched people in the suburbs of cities, especially of Paris. We have to remember also that a tidal wave of de-Christianization, which started in the eighteenth century, was progressively invading all of Europe.

The message of the visions of 1830 calling for prayer, a deep faith and active charity takes on a very deep meaning. These visions occurred in the heart of Paris, one of the largest capitals of politics, economics and culture anywhere. The other great visions of Mary occurred in less populated regions: Lourdes, Fatima, La Salette.

1830 is a key date for France. At the beginning of summer, the reign of the Monarchy of the Restoration was still in place. The way the church and the aristocracy worked to rebuild themselves after the torment of the revolution was furious and ostentatious, which created dissatisfaction and gave rise to a wave of anti-religious feeling. In a few days, the Three Glorious Days of July, everything turned around. Let us read again the notes of Sister Pineau in 1877, which were reported by Rene Laurentin in *Process of Catherine* reports, which appeared in 1979 :

"It was thus in July 1830, France reverberated with songs of

thanksgiving for the capture of Algiers. It seemed that this victory was going to strengthen the throne of Religion in an unshakeable way." But suddenly: *"the most alarming revolution broke out on July 27. Paris was flooded with blood, communities of peasants were overrun and plundered, churches were closed or profaned, crosses were trampled. The whole of France believed they were back in 93 ..."*

This took place three months after the translation of the remains of St Vincent of Paul to the new chapel of Saint-Lazare, carried out with great pomp and general jubilation, on April 25. Surprisingly and contrary to all expectations, this revolution marked the starting point of a revival for the two Vincentian families: the Lazarists, the Priests of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. The Lazarists are spared the turmoil.

At the beginning of July, young Catherine said to her confessor, Father Aladel that St Vincent and the Virgin Mary appeared to her. After careful consideration, he decided to believe her. From that moment, he started to record the accounts of the young novice. Her identity was to remain unknown and was only revealed after her death. Neither Father Aladel nor Catherine wanted the other sisters to know who was the recipient of the messages of the Virgin. On the other hand, these messages were widely diffused by accounts and visual representations. Concerning the appearances themselves, Rene Laurentin established that they were three and that they could be precisely dated.

Tree appearances

The first took place on July 18. The Virgin told Catherine that she wanted to charge her with a mission, which would also be a great trial. *"Do not fear!"* she said two times *"You will have the Grace, have faith!"*. She then announced great misfortunes for France and for the world... *"The cross will be scorned... the streets will be*

full of blood". Catherine was invited to pray for suffering humanity. The message is universal. The Christian prayer is a call to action, to do what we can do to bring peace to humanity, so that it becomes genuine and fraternal, that it opens itself to Gospel.

The second appearance, on November 27, is of great importance. A woman of an inexpressible beauty appeared to Catherine. The beauty that transfigured the face of Mary and the rays of shining splendour which emanated from her hands in the vision of the "Medal" represent the Glory of God revealed to humanity. These rays are "the symbol of the graces that Mary obtains for men." All these symbols appeared in front of a tableau around which it was written in gold letters: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to

you !" Mary is seen as the "Immaculate Conception". The tableau then turned over and, on the reverse, Catherine recognized the letter M surmounted by a small cross and, in the bottom, the hearts of Jesus and Mary. This vision showed that Mary is turned to Christ. She is the mother and the maidservant of the Lord. Through Mary, by her intercession, people discover the God who is Love. God's gift to humanity, the Virgin is also the way which leads to him.

The third appearance, which took place in December (Catherine did not remember the precise day), was an echo of the preceding one.

First steps of the Association

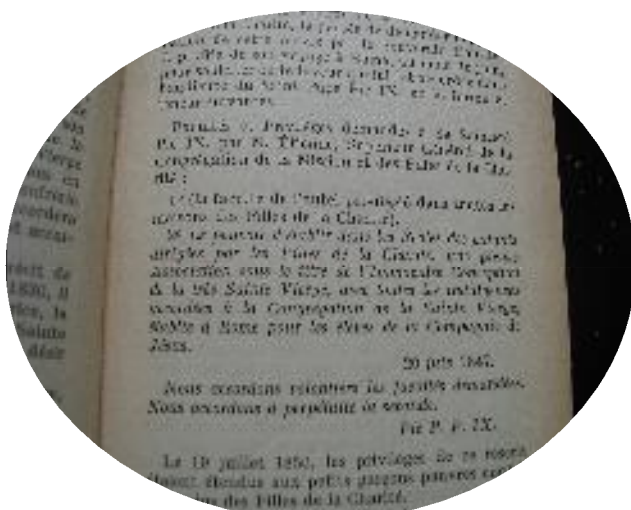
Let us return to the first vision, which concerns us in a special way. Mary asked Catherine to say to Father Aladel: "The Holy Virgin wants you to create a religious community. You will be the founder and the director. It is the Confraternity of the Children of Mary....."

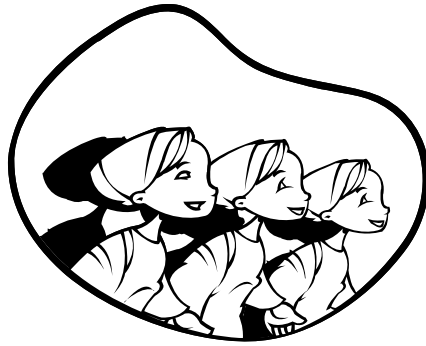
The creation of this confraternity, as the Virgin had asked, dates back to 8th September 1837. We can read in the records of the Association of the 'Children of Mary of the Immaculate Conception', established in the workroom of the parish St Pierre de Gros-Caillou in Paris.

"On September 8, 1848, the feast day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the children of the workroom of Gros-Caillou, dedicated to the Queen of angels, had the joy to see the canonical establishment of the Association of the Children of Mary. This workroom was founded in 1808. It first sheltered war orphans, then cholera orphans, then those of the terror of 1832. It was also the first workroom in Paris that was put under the protection of Immaculate Mary. Also, that very same day of the Nativity of Mary, in 1837, our two venerable communities had the joy to consecrate themselves to their noble Mother Mary".

Beforehand, Jean-Mary Aladel had asked the Daughters of Charity of certain Houses to assemble the children most susceptible to form a pious elite. They were committed to offering these children a more intensive religious education, more centred on devotion to Mary. Examples are the Providence orphanage, the Houses of Charity at St-Médard, the Madeleine, later those of St-Flour, Mainsat and Aurillac. However, the first structured group is certainly that of the parish of St Pierre de Gros-Caillou in Paris, in 1837. Father Aladel gave them the name, "Association of Children of Mary Immaculate."

At the time of the information phase for the beatification of Catherine Labouré, in 1897, Sister Cosnard declared: *"What struck me so much was the zeal with which Father Aladel tried to establish everywhere in our houses associations of Children of Mary".* assumption.





Institution

In June 20, 1847, a Rescript of the Pope Pious IX granted in perpetuity to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity the capacity to establish, in the schools of children directed by Daughters of Charity, a pious confraternity of faithful girls and boys under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin.

The members intended to carry out many works of piety and charity, with all the indulgences granted to the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin established in Rome for the pupils of the Company of Jesus (since 1563, a Marian congregation directed by Jesuits, called *PRIMA Primaria*). This recognition only touched the groups of Paris; It took 3 years for other groups of Children of Mary to be officially recognized. They started to spread in France and abroad (during this period, 55 groups were created in France and eleven abroad, one in Ireland, two in Belgium, one in Algeria, three in Turkey, one in Egypt, two in Italy and one in Chile). This recognition is called the Rescript of July 19, 1850. It concerned only the young people who were attending the schools or the workrooms run by Daughters of Charity. But more and more girls who did not attend these schools or these workrooms, were wanting to join the association.

In September 19, 1876, by an apostolic brief of Pious IX, girls from outside schools or workrooms were able to join Associations of Children of Mary.

Like any other pious association, the Association of the Children of Mary was recognized by the Church while remaining in the hands of the Vincentian family who was the instigator, and who could thus keep a quasi total independence from the Episcopal authority.

A structure, fixed and diffused by two central bodies – the Directory and the Handbook of the Children of Mary – refined the identity of the association. The Directory is a book directed to the various directors. On the other hand the Handbook directed to the Children of Mary themselves.

The first Handbook appeared in 1848. At the beginning, in the Association, there were groups of boys and groups of girls. However, the leaders' attention quickly seemed to focus on girls. Indeed, these handbooks are intended exclusively for the girls and the holy pictures represent only girls.

The vital impetus

Father Aladel was the worthy heir to Father Vincent, who compared the Daughters of Charity to the women who accompanied Christ and the apostles. He regarded woman as a partner in battle: women must be employed as colleagues in apostolic action. The Vincentian feminine ideal was far from the Romantic canons of beauty in the nineteenth century (evanescent, melancholic, morbid and unreal persons). The Association of the Children of Mary was thus open to the girls from ordinary backgrounds, to active, robust, courageous girls, the “good workers”. In this mercantile society, detached from religious values and with unfair social structures, the workers were exposed to promiscuity on the work places,

with temptations of all kinds. The association seemed to be a saving Noah's Ark. We can read in the Register of the Children of Mary of the workroom of Hotel Dieu Hospital, on February 8, 1858: “*They understood all that the Ark which sailed on water of the Flood was a protection for Noah and his family who would infallibly have found death. In the same way, the association is another arch which will preserve them from waters of corruption of the century if they are faithful to their good Mother*”.

The following text is based on their life in 1858: ‘women are allowed to develop, they become hope for religion’. The worker must be simple, courageous and

hardworking; to these qualities are added the virtues of the Holy Virgin. In this way are joined faith, femininity, and efficiency. The young girl is called to personal sanctification. In the manual of 'Children of Mary' it is specified:

“ A Child of Mary is called to a higher perfection than ordinary Christians'. Perfection is aimed for in every stage of life: faith, prayer, work, morality and death build our lives. The association trains experienced workers, well trained in methods to work efficiently. Their qualifications are valued as they were non-existent among women workers at the time. A 'Child of Mary' must set the example in everything!

'Youth is another distinguishing feature of the new confraternity. We elect very young presidents: in many cases they are 12 –14 years old. This illustrates how much these 'Children of Mary' were trained in responsibilities from early adolescence, to be women responsible for themselves, free and strong.'

One of the objectives of Father Aladel was also to support religious vocations. The associations of Children of Mary constituted a considerable source of recruitment of Daughters of Charity. The total number of novices in seminary increased from one hundred in 1830 to more than 500 young sisters eighty years later.

But Father Aladel nourished a much broader intention: by the means of the Children of Mary, he wants to propagate the Marian devotion to the Immaculate Conception in the ordinary levels of society. The Virgin, by addressing herself to a future Daughter of Charity in the heart of Paris, chose a girl from the countryside to Christianise a city. We can find there the Vincentian spirit. Indeed, Vincent De Paul had called upon girls from ordinary backgrounds to form his "army" of Daughters of Charity, in order to come to the assistance, materially and spiritually, of the poor from underprivileged and forgotten backgrounds. At the same time that Catherine Labouré received the message of the Virgin, the Blessed Daughter of Charity Rosalie Rendu achieved an extraordinary work in the most miserable district of Paris.

The association thus trained their children to the apostolate. In the Directory, this role is well developed: "What a powerful and salutary influence can be had on the people who surround a good Christian and pious girl! Charity, of which her heart is filled, is a fire which cannot be stopped, but whose soft and penetrating radiance carries everywhere with it the divine light and heat".

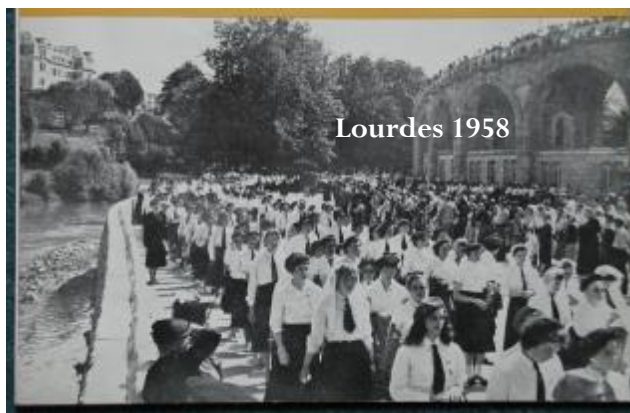
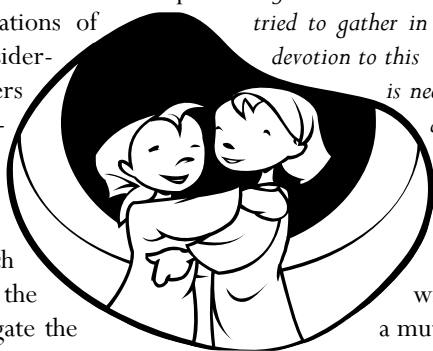
When becoming a Child of Mary, the girl officially recognizes the Virgin Mary as her own mother. She is her mother in heaven. Mary is virgin and mother at the same time; she is thus a symbol of purity and a maternal, consolatory, loving and soothing presence.

Moreover, the association proposed to its members the familiar model of the family. This implies that what binds the Children of Mary to one another is family feelings of respect, fraternity, love, mutual aid. Thus these young girls constitute a model of what should be the human community in its relations and its social practice.

The four virtues that they were asked to practise are: purity, humility, obedience and charity. These are the virtues of Mary, who was chosen by God for her purity, answering the Angel: "let it be done according to your Word! ", and whose life is total gift. The Children of Mary were invited to imitate her; the first book recommended after the handbook is "the Imitation of the Most Blessed Virgin". This book, of unknown origin, proposes "to follow Mary in the various mysteries and the various circumstances of her life, from her Immaculate Conception to her triumphant assumption. The book considers her behaviour, her feelings, the various lessons that are given, as examples we have to follow in the various situations of the life where we are ... It tried to gather in a few chapters everything that talks about devotion to this majestic mother of God, and everything that is needed to revive the feelings of respect, of love and of confidence, in a word the various feelings of which we must be full for her".

The practice of the virtue of charity implies a certain number of actions. Initially, this charity must be exercised within the association. The members owe a mutual help in all their needs, as well spiritual as bodily. "Their nobler ambition is to carry out among them the perfect union of the first Christians, who were forming one heart and one soul."

After the rite of dedication "dedication to Jesus by Mary", the Director sprinkles the ribbons and the medals with holy water, he makes each Child of Mary kiss the medal he is going to give her. While putting on each ribbon, he says: "Receive, my dear child, this ribbon and this medal, as if it was delivered by Mary Immaculate and the extenal sign of your dedication to this tender mother. Remember, while carrying them that you must behave as her worthy daughter by the innocence and the holiness of your behaviour".



DATE	FRANCE POLITIQUE	FAMILLE VINCENTIENNE EGLISE DE FRANCE	EGLISE UNIVERSELLE
1830 25 AVRIL		<i>Translation des restes de St Vincent de Paul à St Lazare</i>	<i>Pie VIII Pape</i>
18 JUILLET		<i>1^{ère} apparition de la Vierge à Catherine Labouré</i>	
27-28-29 JUILLET	<i>Les trois Glorieuses fin des Bourbons Louis Philippe 1^{er} roi des Français</i>		
1831			<i>Election de Grégoire XVI</i>
1832		<i>La Médaille Miraculeuse est gravée</i>	
1833		<i>Fondation de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul</i>	
1846			<i>Election de Pie IX</i>
20 JUIN 1847		<i>Enfants de Marie</i>	<i>Rescrit de Pie IX</i>
FÉVRIER 1848	<i>Révolution- Proclamation de la 2^{ème} République</i>		
10 DÉCEMBRE 1848	<i>Louis Napoléon Bonaparte élu Président de la République</i>		
2 DÉCEMBRE 1852	<i>Coup d'Etat. Napoléon III empereur</i>		
1854			<i>Dogme de l'Immaculée Conception</i>
1856		<i>Mort de sœur Rosalie Rendu</i>	
1870	<i>Désastre de Sedan. La Commune. Naissance de la III république</i>		<i>Concile Vatican I</i>
1876		<i>Mort de Catherine Labouré</i>	
1877		<i>Création des patronages paroissiaux</i>	
1878			<i>Election de Léon XIII</i>
1891			<i>Encyclique « Rerum Novarum »</i>
1902		<i>Syndicats féminins</i>	
1903			<i>Election de Pie X</i>
1909		<i>Les « Louise de Marillac »</i>	
1914-1918	<i>Grande guerre</i>		<i>Election de Benoît XV</i>
1919		<i>Rayon Sportif Féminin (RSF)</i>	
1922			<i>Election de Pie XI Appel du pape en faveur de l'Action Catholique</i>
1931			<i>Encyclique « Quadragesimo Anno »</i>
1936		<i>Naissance de la Fédération des Patronages Catholiques de jeunes filles</i>	

Social action of the Children of Mary



At the origins: patronages

In the middle of the nineteenth century, we owe the establishment of youth groups (in French called *patronages*) for apprentices and young workmen to the Society of Saint Vincent De Paul, in particular to Albert de Melun. The objectives of these groups were to prepare an honest contract of employment for the apprentices, to meet with them in the workshops from time to time, to gather them together on Sundays in order to provide some entertainment and a little religious instruction. The members of the Society of Saint Vincent De Paul worked in collaboration with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Five years after their establishment in Paris, approximately 2000 apprentices were taken in hand by them.

In the Mouffetard district, Sister Rosalie, whom we have already mentioned, was thinking about the girls. Thus she greeted with eagerness the project of patronage Albert de Melun suggested to her. She brought together her former pupils and founded the first patronage of girls with some of the women who helped her with families of the district. For the girls who became workers, or sometimes teachers, an association was created. It brought together those who were regarded as the best, the examples for their companions. They became the guides of the youngest. It seems that, thereafter, the association was divided into “Children of Mary” for the girls and into “Christian Mothers” for the married women.

Priests of parishes, who were badly prepared for this new kind of activity and who were little persuaded of its decisive influence, contented themselves with forming, with the greatest care, a “core of pious people”. It was a traditional method of catholic charity. But to be effec-

tive, charity organization had to act on the masses and not to limit itself to using an elite group as leaven. This activity ought best be done within the parishes which became the privileged place for creation of patronages.

This did not remove the vitality of “free” patronages, which were depending on religious institutions, like the Company of the Daughters of Charity. The Catholics thus put into place a whole system of comprehensive charities: sections for gymnastics, sport, music, conferences, festivals, theatre, workrooms, bulletins, study circles, libraries, nurseries, mutual aid associations, professional and trade-union works, schools.

In 1936, the Commission of the Cardinals and Archbishops of France made the decision to group all Patronages in a “Federation of Catholic Patronages of Girls of France”. At this time, there were about 13.000 young people in patronages conducted by Daughters of Charity in the Paris area.

We can read, in the “RAYONS” of 1919, from the pen of an anonymous Child of Mary, this call: *“What a powerful lever of beneficial social influence are these thousands of Children of Mary. They have a precise apostolic goal in all levels of society, after having received a special serious training. I now understand what you were saying about the trade union, hope of the future (...). Linking its social action to the apostolic religious action of Christian associations, it could include all the ages and all the states (...). Let our work be the good leaven: let a renewal take place in our habits! This revival requires initiative and, powerful means of action: for all that, I would like to know how to pray better and better sacrifice myself. Let this call from a simple Child of Mary be heard!”*

Social and trade-union training of the Children of Mary

What is this trade union which inspires this girl, the author of these lines, with such ardour?

Well before the publication of the historic encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, the children of Mary found parallel to their spiritual formation a serious initiation into the social doctrines of the Church. This consisted of courses of social action organised in Paris

1915 onwards by remarkable Lazarists such as Pere Aroud and Pere Crapez. It is also necessary to mention articles in the RAYONS magazine which gave readers the Church's thoughts on social questions.

Most decisive for the development of this training was the organisation of the **Trade Associations of the Abbey** by Sister Milcent in 1902

The action of Sister Milcent

As a Daughter of Charity, she taught for fifteen years in a school in Caulaincourt Street in Paris. Her pupils were young girls from very ordinary, often miserable, classes of society. These girls were leaving school at a very early age, around the age of 12. They low level jobs, in order to bring home a few francs. The Sister was much worried by this situation, she felt responsible for these children.

Sister Milcent took up the torch of patronages in 1902, after having spent five years at the Mother House in Rue du Bac, revising schoolbooks, since she was director of the schools. She undertook a discrete but effective crusade for the organization of female work. Her brother **Louis** had been, together with Albert de Melun, one of those who propagated the Christian social idea and he was one of the creators of agricultural trade unionism. To some extent, Sister Milcent was his disciple when she founded on the rue de l'Abbaye the first female professional trades unions. Thus professional people took over, in the work with adolescents, from those who taught the children in schools and patronages.

Sister Milcent wanted the trade associations to be fully autonomous, to be made up of workers only and she wanted them to manage the administration. The only prerogative she reserved to herself was the formation of the trade-union spirit and the spirit of mutuality among these girls engaged in professional life.

The achievements were many: professional courses, a mutual retirement fund, unemployment workshops, placement services, female restaurants, convalescent homes. Little by little, these girls became aware of the corporate concept. Progressively, as they became aware

of their growing responsibilities, the sisters withdrew more and more into the background.

Courses of training, contests in embroidery and sewing, (all inherent work, at that time, in the female condition) and certificates of professional capacity maintained the competences of these young workers, while stimulating their desire to progress.

When in 1921, the Mother House relieved Sister Milcent of the moral responsibility of trade unions, she dealt more and more with the workers in their own homes. Their situation had worsened because of the war. She cherished the idea of a minimum wage to prevent the collapse of the salary of the workers.

The action of **Louise Gateblé**, together with Sister Milcent, should not be forgotten. She was a pioneer in the formation of the trade unions. She was the first person who dared to ask her boss for a few days of holidays for some women who were working with her in a factory. The request was granted but only parsimoniously: indeed, the boss gave 8 days of holidays to 12 workers, but not paid!

Extension of the trade unions from l'Abbaye



We will not go into the organization, the structure, the internal life of these trade unions. What interests us is their goals, their achievements, and their growth.

They used to study the problems related to their profession in Study Circles, at the registered office as in the sections. They made inquiries, and drew up the books for their claims. To resolve social conflicts, they recommended the establishment of Joint Committees where delegates of employers and employees could meet.

Some facts help to understand the part these Catholic female trade unions played in the world of work.

In 1917, following strikes among dressmakers, a Joint Committee, under the presidency of the Minister for Labour, was created. It included three employers' groups and three trade unions (a socialist trade union and two Catholics), one of them being that of the dressmaking workers (street of the l'Abbaye). This last presented a much studied report which was often used as a basis for the discussions and whose conclusions were mainly sanctioned by the conventions occurred between the employers' federation and the organized labour.

At the same date, two members of the Trade unions of the Abbey sit at the Higher Council of Work, another was part of the Municipal Commission of Paris. These same trade unions sent a representative in a female delegation received by the Conference of peace and another one was designated as technical adviser at the Congress of the Work which took place in Washington. Considerable social progress was made, like obtaining the weekly rest day in 1906, the minimum wage in dressmaking in 1915.

These results were achieved through the efforts of the trade unions which had Vincentian inspiration.

Thus we can see not only the work which they achieved, but how in barely fifteen years they gained important recognition and notoriety amongst the professional and ruling classes of the country. Here are a few examples of their action to illustrate the vitality of the female Trade unions of l'Abbaye:

- the professional training of the union members is continued thanks to the Study Circles and the libraries,
- the quarterly newspaper "la Ruche" is sent to all the adherents,
- in 1917, technical courses had 2360 pupils,
- in 1918, the placement service found employment for 2000 people
- the Mutual Retirement Fund ensures the pensions and help for descendants, widows and orphans of the deceased members,
- the Co-operative Company buys directly from the producers and allowed its members rebates authorized by many houses,
- creation of a trade-union day nursery in Sceaux,
- five convalescence homes are opened sick workers, for a reasonable pension,
- The Trousseau Mutual insurance company offered to each union member a collection of linen when she got married or at their majority,
- During the war 1914-1918, an unemployment workshop, gave wages to workers in residence.

The inspiration

In the political and economic context of the time: industrial revolution, unrestrained economic liberalism, increasing misery of the people, some Catholics became aware of the problem and became involved. The concern for the improvement of the living and working conditions of the workmen was eventually to be shared soon by the institutional Church. As we have already seen, two Encyclicals appeared. They define the social doctrines of the Church, by which all the Catholics should be inspired: *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

The female trade unions inspired by Sister Milcent and the Daughters of Charity, thus supported by the Church, in all its hierarchical components, could extend and progress in the deepening of their social engagement.

The children of Mary animated these trade unions, thanks to their youth and enthusiasm, and gave them a spiritual *breath* born of their devotion of the Blessed Virgin.

To realize it, we only have to read this act of Dedication to Mary, made up 20 years after the creation of these trade unions :

“Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Immaculate Mother, we, female Trade associations of the Abbey, gathered in Central Union, choose you this day for our patron saint, our guardian, our glorious Mother.

We devote to you ourselves, our spiritual and temporal goods, our professional and trade-union work, and our efforts for the Christian organization of the working society by the peaceful agreement and the collaboration of employers and workers, for the rebuilding of the Christian people. (...).

O powerful Virgin who, in this sanctuary, gave to your dear Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul an obvious proof of your predilection for their Company and their works, obtain for us the grace to remain bound to them ; discharge our debt of gratitude for the assistance which they brought to our foundation and our prosperity. Spread your blessings on them and on us.

Obtain for us the grace, O very loving and very gentle Mother, to be joined by the fraternal charity of the children of God, to work together with devotion to the common good for the love and glory of your Son”.

The association of « Louise de Marillac »

The association of Louise de Marillac is one of the extensions of the Marian Association. For years it functioned almost solely with Children of Mary and produced beautiful fruits of Charity amongst the old, the poor and the lonely. It was founded in 1909 in the Parisian parish of St Nicolas du Chardonney..

One can read, in an issue of Annals of 1910 :

“Father Lenert, the pastor, had conceived the project. Seeing that the work of the Daughters of Charity , (of Vincentian inspiration), was succeeding, he thought that a similar work intended for the girls would be of great spiritual profit for both the people visiting as well as for the visitors. There were several objections to this new idea: the mothers, concerned with the health of their girls, feared contagion and promiscuity when their daughters would be visiting the sick and the poor. Thus, everything was looked into carefully and it was agreed to choose carefully the families the girls would visit, preferably poor old women with no contagious disease. It was also decided that the young beginners would always make their visits with another girl (...) Furthermore, if some danger were anticipated, the Sister of the poor would accompany the visitors. (...) By this devotion, the young ladies of Louise de Marillac charity brought upon themselves and on their families the blessings of God because “spending time near the poor is to go to Jesus” and the pleasure they give to the forsaken of this world by their encouraging words is for them quite a sweet reward. They bring sunshine”.

This occurred in 1909, but the origin is undoubtedly more remote. We can read in a report, that was presented in March the 5th, 1923, to the Archconfraternity of Patronages by the coadjutor of the archbishop of Paris, the following sentences :

“The Association of Blessed Louise de Marillac is a section of the charity of the Women of the Charity established by Saint Vincent De Paul to visit the sick poor in residence: it has the same goal and the same spirit, but it is composed exclusively of girls.

The origin of this charity goes back to the year 1853. It is the date of the foundation in the Patronage, which made the older and the more deserving girls auxiliaries of the Directors in the apostolate and organizations of charity”.

A tribute to Sister Rosalie Rendu follows, for she was the initiator of this form of apostolate. And the report finishes as follows:

“Here was taking root the work that only was born some twelve years ago under the name of Louise de Marillac Charity”.

The charity did an immense amount of good from 1909 to 1969. During 60 years, thousands of girls devoted themselves without restraint to solitary and poor old people. The “Louise de Marillac” sometimes had the opportunity to work with the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul. After careful consideration, the two charities decided to combine at national level: it was on March the 15th, 1969. Here is a paragraph taken from the charter that was established. It summarizes well the ideal common to both works:

“The charitable Movements, which could not be ends in themselves, draw their single raison d'être from the love of the poorest. Thus, the sense of all this research is to live, with a great receptivity, a commitment justified by concern for the deprived. Saint Vincent de Paul invites us “to love Jesus with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms”.

The new Movement, resulting from the fusion of the two Vincentian families, numbers then some 37.000 members gathered in 3.000 teams.

The Ray of Women's Sports

This beautiful Movement, which attracted thousands of girls during a good twenty years came *from the Patronages of the Daughters of Charity*. Its leaders, who animated it right from the start, were almost all part of the Marian Association for young girls and teenagers. In the beginning, they considered their role as a form of apostolate.

The idea of physical education and sport was in the air - parish groups had already taken the initiative since 1898 when an annual contest of physical exercise between various groups was organised - and this started to win over the girls. Those who worked in difficult health conditions felt the need for physical relaxation.

The birth of the Movement is placed in the year 1929. **Father Crapez**, a Lazarist, who was open to all forms of apostolate and activities for the young people, seemed to be one of the initiators. He was extremely devoted to the Blessed Virgin and was the first biographer of Catherine Labouré. He was the one who baptized, one day, the Movement as it was being organized. Because of the "Rays of graces falling from the hands from Mary", he proposed the name of "Female Sporting Ray" or "Rayon sportif féminin", which was accepted everywhere. It was to prove to have a close link with the Marian Association. He presented the first groups in a article published in the *Rayons*: "*Physical education belongs to integral education, it is like the first level. It is appropriate that a review of education does not ignore it (...) And you know, Children of Mary, how much we have at heart your formation in all aspects. Consequently, it is necessary to start from the beginning, from the body, to go on up to the heart*".

Competitions and contests followed, which allowed for friendly meetings, occasions of festive gatherings and a healthy emulation in a fraternal spirit.

The Movement was so successful that in 1934 the Archbishop of Paris opened access to the "Female Sporting Group" to some Parisian groups not dependant on the Daughters of Charity. In 1937 it became a national federation open to all Catholic girls at the request of Catholic Action. It was the starting point for a considerable extension of the Movement which, just before the war, had branches in 60 dioceses and counted approximately 60,000 girls.

Today, it has become the "Federation Sportive et Culturelle de France" (or, "*Sportive and Cultural Federation of France*").

This opening to all patronages was a turning point. All the groups were very close, they were knit together by an extraordinary family spirit. Thanks to the sessions, the instructresses all knew each other. They received a profound spiritual formation by courses and conferences which took place every second Sunday of each month, Rue du Bac.

In the guide of the instructress of the "Female Sporting Rayon", one can read: "*The Instructress has a motto: to serve. (...) Didn't the Virgin define herself as: the maidservant of the Lord, to show us that the spirit of service is the fundamental aptitude of her heart? (...) Like her, learn how to put yourself at the service of the Lord.*"

The association and the Catholic Action

For the Children of Mary the apostolate was always closely related to spiritual and Marian formation. Since the beginning of ANNALS, there were encouragement and testimonies in this direction. For example, in the district of the Madeleine in Paris, activities were carried out in favour of the workers working in the fashion and were called midinettes (shopgirls) because they had an hour off about midday. Most of these girls were raised without religion. This apostolate lasted many years.

Also the Children of Mary were ready when Pope Pious XI, at the beginning of his pontificate in 1922, launched a solemn call in favour of the Catholic Action. He was concerned for the apostolate of the laics.

It took a few years for an effective organization to be set up. In 1932, in a “Rayons” issue, a first very pressing call concerning the Children of Mary can be found. The membership of 683 groups in France, which added up to more than 39.000 girls, was then offered to the Church. Father Crapez encouraged this orientation vigorously: *“Be more than ever concerned to adapt yourself to the forms proposed by the Church itself, to meet the present needs”*.

The four Children of Mary, who took part in the first pilgrimage of new born Catholic Action in Rome, wrote when they returned : *“We understood over there the splendid organization of Catholic Action which seeks neither to replace, neither to absorb, nor to unify, but to coordinate, to link...”*.

And, in a “Rayons” issue of 1934, we can read this solemn undertaking :

“The final goal of the Association of the Children of Mary is undoubtedly to honour with a special worship Mary, Immaculate from her conception, but this worship must be translated – and it was thus right from the start – not only under the angle of personal sanctification, but in the form of a true apostolate. The individual and social apostolate; mutual charity and external charity; the action in multiple forms; justice and charity; here is what is requested from the Children of Mary, as is testified to by the statutes of the association, the new and the old handbooks. However, is the Catholic Action not the participation of the catholic laity in the hierarchical apostolate ?”.

The Children of Mary are asked to be at the same time like a body of connection between various Movements of Catholic Action and as a higher school of spiritual life where these Movements would draw their energy from the heart of Most Blessed Virgin.

The fact is that, in 1938, the Children of Mary had given to various movements Catholic Action :

694 members	of the J.O.C.
169 members	of the J.E.C
98 members	of the J.A.C
77 members	of the J.I.C

Moreover, in the diocese of Paris only, 267 catechists, 475 members of Patronages and 285 instructresses of the “Female Sporting Rayon” devoted themselves.

The review “Rayons” was gradually preparing its readers for a new sphere of activity which awaited them in Catholic Action and, judging by the quantity of articles devoted to this subject in the years which followed, we can affirm that the engagement of the Children of Mary in this great adventure of the Church was total.

Appendix 1 : The Marian devotion of St Vincent of Paul

Father Vincent was a man of his time. It was the time of the Counter-Reformation, more precisely the application in the Church, of the Council of Trent. The Virgin Mary returned to honour and the Mother of the Saviour was more and more called Immaculate, because she could not be soiled by sin. Thus the king Louis XIII asking the Pope, in 1624, “..... to order that Mary’s festival under the title of the Immaculate Conception be solemnized in all of Christendom”. And he dedicated his Kingdom to Mary.

This time of revival of the Church witnessed the birth and development of a theological school (known as the School of French Spirituality) whose most outstanding personality was Cardinal de Bérulle. One could also mention Condren, Olier, St John Eudes... For them, whose theology is very Christocentric, Jesus led to Mary. Popular devotion to Mary is very strong and one can even speak about promotion of woman because certain female figures had a considerable influence: Therese d'Avila, Madame Acarie, Jeanne de Chantal, Louise de Marillac, Mother Arnould Angelica...

The Marian devotion of St Vincent falls under this context. De Bérulle, endorsed certain dogmatic assertions, and Vincent was sensitive to the manifestations of popular piety. He went bare-foot on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Buglose in 1623. Ten years later, he sent Louise de Marillac to Chartres so that she might offer the Company of the Daughters of Charity to Our Lady. In 1639 he accompanied Nicolas Pavillon in Chartres so that he might receive the assistance of Mary in accepting the see of Alet to which he had been nominated..

This devotion is not limited to external demonstrations. Amongst the first rules of the confraternities or companies which it created one finds the same invocation of the Virgin: “*this Company, has the pleasure to be under your protection*”. We will give two examples of them.

- In 1617, he set up the Confraternity of Châtillon-les-Dombes: “... *the Mother of God being called upon and being taken for patroness in things of importance...*”

- By instituting, in 1658, a special devotion to Mary among the Daughters of Charity, he proposes this prayer: “*Since it is under the standard of your protection that the Company of Charity is established, as from the beginning we called you our Mother, we now beg you to approve the offering that we make to you of this Company in general and of each one in particular. And because you allow us to call you our Mother and that you are the Mother of mercy, of the channel of which proceeds any mercy, which obtained from God, as it is to be believed, the establishment of company, be pleased to take it under your protection*”.⁽²⁾

- To all, priests of the Mission, Confraternities of Charity, Daughters of Charity, Father Vincent recommended carrying and reciting the rosary. He told them to recite the Angelus and he fasted on the eve of festival days of the Virgin.

Appendix 2 : Marian Teachings of St Vincent of Paul

1. The Virgin is “the maidservant”

- She is that which loves Christ because, by her maternity, she was so closely united to him. She fervently treasured all the words of her Son.

- She discovered in her Son and by him the meaning of submission to the divine will. Her *FIAT* is a model of obedience, and in all the circumstances of her life, even to the Cross, she submitted “to the good pleasure of God”⁽³⁾.

- She is the modest and quiet Virgin, poor maidservant of the Lord who was proposed as the first maidservant of the poor to the Daughters of Charity.

- She is humble, is perfectly tuned into the mind of God, and her humility is an example: “If you feel that God invites you to hope for this grace (humility), do not harden your heart, run to the Blessed Virgin, requesting her to obtain for you from her Son the grace to take part in her humility, which made her the maidservant of the Lord when she was selected for his mother. Why did God look at the Virgin? She says to herself: it is my humility”⁽⁴⁾.

2. Three mysteries of Mary

Immaculate Conception

For Vincent, Mary is the creature par excellence, she empties herself to let herself be filled by the Love of God and let the Holy Spirit achieve her work. She is an example for any person who must dispossess himself of himself to fill himself by God.

“God thus provided that, as it was necessary that his Son took human flesh by a woman, that it was suitable that it took it by a worthy woman to receive him, woman who was full of graces, without sin, filled with piety and removed from all bad affections. He thus looked upon all the women who were to be and did not find one worthy of this great work but the very pure and very immaculate Virgin Mary”⁽⁵⁾.

Annunciation

Mary offers herself to God without reserve because she has the soul of a poor person. This offering to God in his Son, by his Son and with him, is our baptized vocation.

“When the angel went to greet the Blessed Virgin (...) he recognizes her and praises her full with graces. And then what does he do for her? This beautiful present, of the second person of the Holy Trinity; the Holy Spirit, collecting the purest blood of the Blessed Virgin, formed one body of them, then God created a heart to inform this body, and at once the Word is linked with this heart and this body by an admirable union, and thus the Holy Spirit operated the unutterable mystery of the Incarnation. The praise preceded the sacrifice”⁽⁶⁾.

Visitation

The third mystery concerns the gift to others by the service of charity. As said Vincent, Mary runs to the house of Elisabeth and goes towards it “in all sweetness, love, charity”⁽⁷⁾.

In imitation of Christ and Mary, all the Vincentian family must live faithful to the spirit of St Vincent of Paul by carrying out this gift to God for the service of the poor.

All the Marian thoughts, devotions and prayers of St Vincent tend towards this : Mary is a model of fidelity, obedience, humility, receptivity, free gift, of charity, that the three mysteries which we have just evoked illustrate so well.

(1) ibd. X, 623

(2) ibd. VII, 419

(3) ibd. X, 536-537

(4) ibd. XIII, 35

(5) ibd. XII, 327

(6) ibd. IX, 258

(7) ibid. IX, 258

Appendix 3 : Louise de Marillac

A4. Oblation to the Blessed Virgin

"I am entirely yours, most Holy Virgin, that I may more perfectly belong to God. Teach me, therefore, to imitate your holy life by fulfilling the designs of God in my life. I very humbly beg you to assist me. You know my weakness. You see the desires of my heart. Supply for my powerlessness and negligence by your prayers. Since your dear Son, my Redeemer, is the source of the heroic virtue of which you gave the example during your life on earth, unite the spirit of my actions to His for the glory of His holy love. May all creatures pay homage to your greatness and look upon you as the sure means for reaching God. May they love you above all other pure creatures and render you the glory you deserve as the beloved Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son and worthy Spouse of the Holy Spirit."

Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac – Sr. L Sullivan, p.695 (last par.)

M33. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin

"Let us celebrate, in a special way, the Church feasts honouring Mary and meditate, during the day, on the mystery proposed. Each day, let us implore her to help us to render to God the service we have promised Him and to be as submissive as she was in accomplishing His holy will.

"We should faithfully recite, each day, those prayers which we have chosen to honour her. These should include acts of love as well as of joyful praise for the glory that is hers in heaven. Finally, let us continue to hope that we will one day be with her and will thus be able to render to her all the honour due to her in the divine plan."

Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac – Sr. L Sullivan, p. 785/786

A8. Retreat

"I must be greatly ashamed on account of my pride and, in imitation of the Holy Virgin, humble myself not only when there is true reason to do so but I must even give myself to God to serve my neighbour in situations where I will be subject to blame in the eyes of the world. Thus, I shall imitate Our Lord who conversed with sinners and who, throughout His life, despised His own temporal interests so as to be useful to His creatures. I desire to do likewise if such be His holy will."

Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac – Sr. L Sullivan, p. 719 (Sunday, 5 p.m.)