

VINCENTIANA



Charity - Mission

VINCENT
DE PAUL
LOUISE DE
MARILLAC
350th anniversary

November-December 2009

53th Year - N. 6



AMM

Centenary of the
Pontifical Approbation
of the Association
of the Miraculous Medal

1909 - 2009

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

GENERAL CURIA

ADVENT 2009

To all the Members of the Vincentian Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

In the period that I was director of the internal seminary in Panama, and at the same time pastor of the parish where the internal seminary was located, I and another confrere did a special program during Advent with the intention of purifying the meaning of Christmas. It was a campaign against the figure of Santa Claus and in favor of El Niño Dios, the Child God. We ran the campaign throughout the whole of Advent and then had a symbolic expression of purifying the meaning of Christmas during the penitential rite of the Christmas Eve celebration.

What provoked this pastoral action on the part of my confrere and myself was seeing the subtle change that was taking place in the area in which we were working pastorally. When I first arrived in Panama the experience of Christmas was always focused on the birth of the Child Jesus, El Niño Dios. The emphasis was clearly a religious focus on the birth of God into the life of humanity. And yet, little by little, over the years, in and through tremendous marketing techniques, the concept of Christmas slowly began to be replaced with images of the commercial side of Christmas with the appearance of Santa Claus figures in all the stores and then even given away as gifts to the people to put in their homes and on their front doors, as decorations for the season. It was sad to see how in a very subtle and cunning marketing way the true meaning of Christmas was being replaced by deepening people's desires to participate in a consumer society.

This Christmas, especially in this time of Advent, I would like to focus on it being a time of bringing back the true meaning of Christmas and purifying our attitudes with regard to what we are really about in this most significant liturgical time of our Christian faith. It is about the birth of God into our lives in and through the

person of the Child God, Jesus, a theme so important in the spirituality of our own Saint Vincent de Paul, God becoming flesh, becoming one with us in order that we might become like God in our relationships one with another, especially with the poor.

This Advent season, I would like us to think about and reflect on a particular aspect of the Christmas season which is so important: to understand the birth of the Lord Jesus as one who comes to bring to the world peace and harmony. He is the Prince of Peace as we reflect on the scriptures throughout the Advent-Christmas season. What has provoked me to want to speak more in depth and to have us reflect on the subject of peace is the actual world situation in which we live today.

We see all around us in every corner of the globe destructive situations, wars between nations, violence between peoples, even neighborhoods with gang violence, and in the very homes, domestic violence. In such a violent atmosphere in which we live world-wide, there is a search, a struggle, an anxiety to live with greater security. Oftentimes "security" is attempted in and through having more weapons and greater power of destroying the enemy. In such a light the security promoted only provokes more anxiety. It is nothing that we can truly consider as security.

There are many that say that since the experience of 9/11 in the United States we have fallen into a world that looks for its own security to the point where we become unconscious or unaware or even indifferent towards securing true peace and security for others outside of our own circle. We assume attitudes of wanting to be protective of our own, closing in on ourselves. We seek to be close to what is known and even close to what we might consider home, giving us an illusion of security.

The consumer attitude which is creeping into all levels of our global village is highlighted in the Christmas season. We are challenged to turn to the Prince of Peace who in and through the promotion of His Father's kingdom, calls forth attitudes that produce true harmony and good relationships among all peoples.

I want to propose a concrete point for our reflection that has to do with the promotion of peace and harmony in the world in which we live, first and foremost shown through open concern for the needs of others.

In view of the celebration of the 350th Anniversary of the deaths of Saint Louise and Saint Vincent in 2010, the international leaders of the Vincentian Family have named a Projects Committee to develop a specific initiative in favor of the poorest of the poor that would involve all the branches of the Family. From among the options

suggested, the leaders selected a pilot project in micro-finance based in Haiti. The micro-finance, combined with educational programs and social services, has proved to be an effective instrument of transforming the lives of many who are experiencing poverty. It is anticipated that such a pilot project could serve as a model that could be followed in other places.

I encourage all of us this Christmas season, especially when we want to consider giving of ourselves to others through gifts to do it in breaking the consumer attitudes that oftentimes are deeply rooted within our lives, attitudes that perhaps we are not quite aware of, which can lead many times to attitudes of those who have and those who have not, and therefore cause divisions instead of bringing about harmony between peoples. It is such negative attitudes like these when pushed to the extreme that bring about the violence and destruction we experience in our world today. Most times violence is provoked by the very fact that people do not have their basic needs met. They fall into the trap of violence in order to secure for themselves a better way of life.

Let us, as a Vincentian Family, this Advent season, reflect on wanting to change attitudes from a consumer society bent, to a giving of oneself or giving of alternative gifts to those in need as a concrete way of promoting harmony and peace.

I suggest a second point for our reflection regarding the promotion of peace. In these days prior to Advent, we had a request on the part of the international council of Pax Christi, to visit our Curia in Rome. We cordially created that space and opportunity for the International Board of Pax Christi to speak to us. Present at that meeting were one of my Assistants, one of the Daughters of Charity who works on our staff, and a confrere who is very supportive in the area of justice and peace actions that we want to be open to and promote as an international Vincentian Family. I think it might be worth our while to investigate and reflect on the possibility of being connected to such international movement as Pax Christi.

Pax Christi began at the end of the Second World War when a group of French and German people came together to pray, to seek reconciliation and to work toward peaceful new beginnings after years of bitter conflict. That same spirit continues to inspire the international Pax Christi movement today by bringing together ordinary people from many different backgrounds and cultures as they shape and act upon their sacred vision of peace, reconciliation and justice for all. In a world shaken by violence, terrorism and deepening inequalities and global insecurity, that vision is needed more than ever.

Let me share a little bit more about Pax Christi for your own personal reflection. Pax Christi is a world-wide Catholic group for peace. Some member organizations in the Pax Christi network have grown from different roots and even use a different name. But all share the conviction that peace is possible and the vicious cycles of violence and injustice can be broken. As a faith-based group, Pax Christi international seeks to have a transforming influence, making religion an unequivocal force for peace and justice. It is Catholic in its origin and tradition, and firmly committed to cooperation with other religious traditions and with all who share its objectives.

Working for peace implies working against violence and Pax Christi International researches into the root causes of violence. Pax Christi International gives priority to non-violent means of resolving conflict and this includes strengthening the basis of a peaceful society: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Pax Christi promotes peace education, youth work, training in peace-making skills, mediation and non-violent action. Pax Christi works to create a culture of peace and helps people as they move toward reconciliation and more hopeful futures.

What can we do? I suggest, my brothers and sisters, that as a Vincentian Family, we explore in our daily lives and in our personal commitment to serving those living in poverty ways to deepen our affirmation of justice and peace. I know that we are already doing this, but the Christmas Season brings the special opportunity to renew our response. This should be a bottom line commitment of anyone who lives the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, who so often looked for harmony and peace especially for the poor who are often the victims of violence, destruction and war. We can support the work of Pax Christi through our own work and prayer, our publicities such as I am doing here in this Advent letter. Pax Christi International welcomes financial help in its efforts to transfer violence and to foster a culture of peace so much needed in our world today.

My brothers and sisters, as we begin this Advent season reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas let us do so by being promoters of peace, especially in a society that is prone to violence — this society which is oftentimes provoked by a world that is selfish and materialistic and bent on consuming. We know that this creates division rather than harmony. Let's reflect on the true meaning of Christmas in and through the birth of the Lord Jesus, and put aside other images that our world has created that are only meant to satisfy our own personal and materialistic needs rather than being concerned about giving to others.

As Vincentian Family, we bring together people from many different backgrounds and cultures as we attempt to shape and act upon our shared vision of peace, reconciliation and justice for all. This is very much at the heart of our spirituality.

As Saint Vincent de Paul said: "Ask His Divine Goodness to give the Company the spirit of union for we have been established to reconcile souls with God and people with one another" (COSTE XI, p. 6).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR
(7-12 December 2009)

Rome, 29 December 2009

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear Brothers in Saint Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I write to inform you of the different activities that we carried out in our *tempo forte* meeting 7-12 December. Our ongoing formation for this *tempo forte* dealt with the Synod of Africa presented by Father Gian Paolo Pezzi, a Camboni Father with many years of experience as a missionary in different parts of the world including Africa. The interchange was very lively and well appreciated by the members of the Curia.

As special guests this week we also had Dan Borlik, who reported to us on his canonical visit to the Province of North India, a visit that he carried out in the name of the Superior General during the month on November and a part of the month of December; and from the new Visitor of Congo, Father Stanislav Zonták who gave us an update on the situation in the province as he has begun his new role there accompanying the confreres.

1. During the whole week we had the company of the Preparatory Commission of the **General Assembly 2010**. We met with them at the beginning of the *tempo forte* session as well as at its closing to bring together the final preparations for the General Assembly. They worked specifically on updating the Directory, the calendar of events for the General Assembly and the liturgical preparations, as well as the *documentum laboris* which is now a ***documentum of consultation*** which will be sent to all the participants of the General Assembly in preparation for the General Assembly along with a cover letter from the Superior General. Other matters regarding the General Assembly were that we reviewed the list of participants and we determined the logo for the General Assembly 2010 which was done by our

confrere from the Province of Paris, Father Alexis Cerquera. We also had a report from the Statutes Committee. This Committee is headed by Father Alberto Vernaschi who was here prior to the beginning of the *tempo forte* to finalize the work, together with Father Giuseppe Turati who is also the coordinator of the Preparatory Commission of the General Assembly.

2. We discussed the **activities for the 350th anniversary** of the passage from earth to heaven of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. We discussed the letter from Father Maloney regarding the Haiti project and the invitation to present names for the person who will be responsible for developing the micro project in Haiti. We read a report from the Secretariate Commission, particularly information received concerning the booklet that has been prepared for the 350th, but has had a very poor response from the different provinces throughout the Congregation. The booklet is intended to help us not only have a remembrance of the 350th, but as a concrete, simple way of sharing with others information about our Holy Founders and the charism as it is lived today. We studied two petitions from confreres from Brazil regarding ways of being able to celebrate more intensely the 350th. We congratulate these confreres on their creativity and hope that in one way or another their requests can be met.
3. We worked on the final details of the **New Visitors Meeting** which will take place 6-12 January when we hope for the participation of 17 new Visitors. The main objective of the meeting is to analyze and study the *Practical Guide for the Visitor* in order that they are prepared to give quality service in their mission as Visitors for the Congregation. The methodology will be mostly workshops in which each one will have the opportunity to participate in the different themes presented. The presenters will be the Superior General, the General Council and other members of the Curia as well as Corpus Delgado who will coordinate the workshop once again.
4. We discussed a memo from the Executive Secretary of **SIEV**, Father Julio Suescun, giving us an update on the different activities that were discussed at the last SIEV meeting. Among them is the intention to have another workshop for Vincentian investigators in 2011 and hopefully, at the same time, another workshop on Islam. Father Eugene Curran will organize an activity at All Hallows, in Dublin, concerning Saint Vincent de Paul in his social context.

5. We discussed a document from the **Union of Superiors General** on the theme of HIV/Aids and how that is to be dealt with in a pastoral manner. The Council decided to send a copy of this document for the internal use of the Visitors and their Councils. It is a theme that will be treated in one of the workshops that we will have during our General Assembly.

6. We treated a number of **economic matters** of which the longest discussion dealt with how to speak in the General Assembly about the need for a Common Fund for ongoing and initial formation, the needs of the missionaries and support of the elderly confreres. We want to move from simply presuming on good intentions and generosity of one province to another to a sense of solidarity that includes charity and justice.

We approved a number of budgets for the different offices of the Congregation of the Mission, including CIF, VSO, the Vincentian Family, our Vincentian Library and Archives in the Curia, the COVIAM Assistant, Vincentian Marian Youth International Secretariat, MISEVI International, the UN Representative and prioritizing extraordinary maintenance needs of the General Curia. The Curia building is beginning to show its age. The building is debilitating and the expenses for maintenance increase every year. We are concerned, not only about the conditions inside the house, but also around the house. As those of you who have visited the Curia know, we have a beautiful garden and yet some of the trees are growing out of control and becoming dangerous because of the proximity to the houses in the neighborhood. All such matters of maintenance, extraordinary or normal today, are a very high expense. Therefore we have to prioritize what we can do now and what can we put off until another year.

7. We studied the **VSO report** from Father Miles Heinen, its Executive Director. Since our last *tempo forte*, VSO has taken on two new projects: one in the international mission of Papua New Guinea and the other in the Vice-Province of Nigeria. In his report Father Miles also spoke about two VSF micro project grants, one for the Province of Southern India in Tanzania and the other for the Vice-Province of Mozambique. The VSO is promoting an Advent appeal to the confreres of the United States in favor of two projects in Ethiopia. The VSO is also working together with Father Bob Maloney concerning the micro finance project in Haiti. Father Miles provided us with a chart that included a breakdown of projects by type, projects by activity and

total financing of projects by province. We recommend that you check out the Vincentian Solidarity Office Bulletin that can be found on their web page, www.famvin.org/vso.

8. We received reports from the **CIF program**: one by Father José Antonio Ubillús, the Assistant who is the liaison between CIF and the General Council, and one from its Director, Marcelo Manimtim. In the most recent CIF session all of the participants were from developing countries. There were no participants from either Europe or the United States, which is a trend in the CIF program itself. The difficulty we have is not being able to provide half-scholarships for the different participants. A request will be made with the assistance of the Vincentian Solidarity Office and provinces providing scholarships for confreres. In the past, we received pledges of assistance; as of the last year, we had received pledges only from two provinces. Therefore the fund for scholarships is dwindling. Every year the CIF program, although we consider it a very valuable means for the Congregation of the Mission regarding ongoing formation at an international level, becomes an expensive item in the General Curia budget. We are doing our best to sustain this project. We count on the assistance of provinces that are able to support it financially.

We studied the program for the sessions for Brothers that will be held 9 April - 4 June 2010. The program is well developed with a number of different conferences focused on the identity of members of the Congregation in general and particularly the identity of Brothers. We have also approved to open this workshop for Brothers from other religious Congregations of Brothers who share our Vincentian charism. I encourage all Visitors to consider the possibility of sending at least a representation of their Brothers to this workshop which will be beneficial for their ongoing formation as well as for their being able to share that information with the other Brothers of the provinces.

We also approved the possible shift in schedules for the program by recommending that the larger program be from April to June, the heritage session from September to October, and the Servant Leadership workshops be in February and/or July. The reason for the shift is that since the majority of the participants are coming from the Southern Hemisphere and tropical climates, it is more preferable that they be in Paris in the seasons that are more tolerable for them.

9. We received a report from Father Manny Ginete. He participated in **Vincentian Family** formation sessions in three cities in the Philippines from 16-18 October. He was there to animate the regional Vincentian Family coordinating Councils in regard to the 350th anniversary celebrations. In all he had a total of 300+ participants in the three cities, from various branches of the Vincentian Family. The outcome of these discussions was a resolution to have continuing formation sessions on the Vincentian charism once a month.

Father Ginete also reported on the AIC Asian meeting in Bangkok from 6-8 November prior to the continental session for the Vincentian Family Leaders and Advisors. The continental session, held 9-13 November in Bangkok with a focus on systemic change, brought together just under 80 participants from 12 Asian countries. The various branches present agreed to form a Vincentian Family Coordinating Council for Asia-Oceania. According to Father Ginete, the greatest achievement of the meeting was the sense of being Vincentian Family in Asia.

Father Ginete also reported his participation in a few of the days of the AMM International Assembly which was held in Paris 16-20 November. There were 66 delegates from 27 countries present. The Assembly had the objective of consolidating the Association of the Miraculous Medal through the elaboration of new General Statutes. The Assembly was timed to coincide with the closing of the centenary of the Pontifical approval of the AMM Statutes in 1909.

Father Ginete then reported on his participation in the CIF session 20-21 November, focusing on the two collaborative projects, namely the continental sessions and the 350th anniversary celebration.

10. We studied the minutes of the second meeting of the Commission for the **Vincentian Family Youth Gathering** which will take place 13-15 August prior to the World Youth Day in 2011 in Madrid, Spain. The theme selected is *Vincentians: A Style of Life for Today*. Three aspects will be reflected on over these three days: To be and not to pretend to be; rooted in Christ by example of Saint Vincent de Paul; with Mary we are called to be sowers of hope. Among the objectives are to deepen the specific knowledge of the life and spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul and other witnesses from the Vincentian Family; to improve the knowledge and experience of the Vincentian charism as well as Marian spirituality; to come to know the Vincentian Family from

different points of the world; to deepen our relationships with one another; to celebrate the richness of our charism in the Church; to allow for a meeting with oneself, with others and with God. The Gathering will be significant for growth in faith of all youth and also provide space for meeting, sharing, establishing relationships both personal and institutional. The planners are preparing for some 2000 Vincentian Youth members. During the World Youth Week there will also be another Vincentian Gathering on 17 August. The Committee will be soliciting a space on the famvin web page in order to share more information and encourage participation in this activity.

11. We received a report from John Freund, the coordinator of the **web page** for the Vincentian Family. Some of the discussion was around the question of how to make the General Assembly available to the members of the Congregation of the Mission. There is a good possibility that much of the presentations and the round table discussions can be presented live and also through the use of You Tube. Father Freund, through the Vincentian Family web page, has also expanded some activities, one is creating maps of the different provinces of the Congregation of the Mission. Check out the web page to see the different initiatives to give us a greater knowledge of the Congregation and the Vincentian Family (<http://vinformation.famvin.org>).
12. We reviewed reports from **CLAPVI**, **COVIAM**, and **NVC** (the National Visitors Conference of the United States). We reviewed the situation in our three international missions. Regarding El Alto, Bolivia we spoke about the expansion of that mission which will take place in the near future in Cochabamba. At this time we have two confreres with the hope of finding a third and perhaps a fourth to help minister in this area. With regard to the mission in the Solomon Islands, we studied their community plan and admired their enthusiasm to move this mission forward not only as a seminary but also to different other pastoral activities linked with the seminary. At present there are only six confreres in this mission and we desperately need personnel to maintain the philosophy/theology seminary, the formation for our own candidates, as well as formation of the catechists and other ministries in the area that the confreres are involved in. In other aspects regarding the missions, we received from the Visitor of China, an update on the state of the Province of China with a growing number of candidates for the Congregation both discerners and diocesan priests who desire to become part of the

Congregation of the Mission. This year the Province of China celebrates the 310th anniversary of the presence of missionaries in China. We encourage confreres to get to know the province and different aspects of its works and to consider being part of the effort to prepare for mission in mainland China.

We received a letter from the Bishop of Asmara, Eritrea, inviting the availability of confreres that would be able to deal with the diaspora of Eritrean refugees. That information was passed on to the Visitor of Eritrea. The Vice-Province of St. Justin de Jacobis is doing a number of different things related to its fellow countrymen living in extreme situations of suffering hunger and the like. We made a decision as a General Curia to contribute to a fund to help feed the poor in Eritrea and we invite any and all provinces and confreres within the provinces to consider a donation to help curb this most immediate need since there has been a drought and now an extended famine in Eritrea.

We received requests from six confreres to participate in the international missions. Of those six, hopefully three will be able to be placed within the next year.

13. We shared our **calendars** from January, February and March 2010. The members of the General Council and the Superior General will be participating in the New Visitors Meeting. The Superior General will also be involved in the international meeting of the Vincentian Marian Youth. He will participate in the establishment of the new Western Province in the United States. He will gather with other members of the Vincentian Family at the end of January for their session of ongoing formation. He will participate in February in the General Assembly of MISEVI in Bogota, Colombia. He hopes to visit the Vice-Province of Mozambique and the Daughters of Charity in Angola to finish out the month of February. In March he will be participating in an activity in Madrid for the Vincentian Family, in Paris for the feast of Saint Louise de Marillac, Lebanon for the anniversary of the high school in Antoura, in Paris for the Vows of the Daughters of Charity and he will share Holy Week with a confrere who works on the Indian Reservation in the United States and hopes to have the opportunity to visit some of the Daughters of Charity who work in that area.

Tempo forte this time took longer than usual. It was six days with sessions every morning and two days with sessions in the afternoon. We are working hard for the well being of the Congregation of the

Mission and its participation in the Vincentian Family. We appreciate your support and your prayers, and you can be assured that you are in our prayers as we try to live our Vincentian charism.

I take this opportunity to wish all of you a most holy and happy Christmas season, welcoming once again in the midst of our lives the Child God with us.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

DOSSIER

The Association of the Miraculous Medal

Closing of the Centenary of its Pontifical Approbation

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

It seemed only right that as we began the Jubilee Year to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the death of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, the Miraculous Medal Association should solemnly bring to a close the 100th anniversary of its Pontifical approval. *Vincentiana* wishes to preserve the memory of this event because of the uniqueness of the Miraculous Medal Association.

The Virgin Mary who wanted to entrust the Miraculous Medal to a Daughter of Charity also desired that a missionary should be the Director of the Association that had been established to spread the message of the medal. From that time the Congregation of the Mission has assumed the honorable duty of encouraging this Association in the fulfillment of the end for which it was established. *Vincentiana* wishes to remind all people, but especially the

missionaries, that here we not only have an area of evangelization but also a powerful impulse for our apostolate and a wonderful aid in our evangelization of the poor. With reason we are able to consider this among the Vincentian works which ought to grow and be developed during this 350th anniversary.

Vincentiana had hoped to present the current state of the Miraculous Medal Association throughout the world but has to be content with reflecting the enthusiastic renewal that the representatives manifested in Paris. The works that had been solicited did not allow for anything more or else they did not arrive in time.

In order to be faithful to its character as a journal of Vincentian studies, *Vincentiana* includes in this number a long and profound study on the Miraculous Medal. The new proposal for a way of explaining the message of the Virgin with the globe beneath her feet will help us to involve ourselves in the Association and work for the accomplishment of its ends.

Lastly, *Vincentiana* is happy to be able to print the unpublished letter of Saint Vincent to Father Portail. This is a small homage that *Vincentiana* is able to render to this faithful collaborator with our Founders who went to his mission in heaven during the same year as they did, and consequently, also 350 years ago.

International Meeting of the Miraculous Medal Association

Paris, 15-20 November 2009

by Enrique Rivas Vila, C.M.
Subdirector General of the AMM

From November 15-20 the International Meeting of the Miraculous Medal Association was held in Paris. This marked the solemn closing of the Jubilee Year to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the pontifical appropriation of the Association.

On November 20, 2009 the one-hundredth anniversary of the pontifical approbation of the Miraculous Medal Association was concluded with the Eucharist that was celebrated in the Chapel of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin to Saint Catherine Labouré. Father Gregory Gay, C.M., superior general and director general of the Miraculous Medal Association, presided at the Eucharist. Thirty other priests, the majority of them National Directors of the Association, concelebrated the Eucharist. All the participants at the international meeting, as well as many Daughters of Charity and numerous faithful who regularly worship at the Chapel participated in the Eucharist. This was made possible since the time of this celebration had been previously announced (this was not the normal time for the celebration of the Eucharist).

At the moment of giving honor and glory to God, that is, at the time of proclaiming the doxology at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, everyone joined together in a gesture of gratitude in Christ, for Christ and through Christ for the many graces received during this Holy Year which was now drawing to a conclusion. We also expressed our gratitude for the impact that this Holy Year has had on the national groups and the members of the Association. There, at the place from which everything began, at the altar where we always come together, there together with Mary whose presence is still felt in that chapel, we expressed the joy and gratitude of the entire Association, the gratitude of each and every member

throughout the world. We did this with an awareness that the Association is a gift that comes from the Lord and Mary.

Previously we had celebrated the International Meeting in the form of an Assembly even though we did not give this name to our coming together because this type of meeting does not exist in our present statutes. We trust that the next time we come together we will do so as an authentic assembly (the result of revising our Statutes which was accomplished during this meeting).

In fact the primary task of this International Meeting was to present new Statutes to the Miraculous Medal Association during this celebration of the Holy Year, or perhaps it is better to state that we wanted to adapt and revise the present statutes so that we might respond in a better way to the concerns of the Church and the world in which we live.

We realized that we had to be faithful to two realities and then from that perspective elaborate a text. Thus we had to be faithful first of all to the fact that the Association, desired by the Blessed Virgin, was commanded to continue to proclaim the message that she had left us. This was our primary concern: to respond to Mary, to give thanks to her for her initiative and to attempt to question ourselves about the ways in which the Association responds to the present day situation.

Second, we realized that we also had to be faithful to that which we were commemorating this year, namely, fidelity to the Church as expressed in the Statutes that were given to us by Saint Pius X in 1909 and that were revised and approved by the Holy See in 1998. This was perhaps one of the most enlightening reflections of the entire meeting. In his Statutes, Saint Pius X defined us as *an association of faithful*. The same definition is repeated in the Statutes of 1998. In other words, in accord with canon 298 we are an association composed of clergy and laity which responds very well to the characteristics of its members since according to Saint Pius X, in order to be a member of said Association it is sufficient to have received the blessed medal and to carry it with oneself repeating frequently the words inscribed on the medal. In this sense our Association is something unique within the Church and especially within our Vincentian Family. Who has not received this medal, worn it and frequently recited the invocation *O Mary...?* We can say that all of us, missionaries, Daughters of Charity and lay members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family are truly members of the Miraculous Medal Association. It is clear, however, that among this great number of members there are some among the laity, the missionaries, Daughters of Charity, women and men of different religious institutes who have committed themselves for a limited or



Participants in the Meeting.

indefinite time to carry out the different tasks of the Association and therefore said members are called *committed members* in the proposed Statutes. The Association is more than a lay association and therefore its structures ought to respond to its proper juridical nature. This was the great challenge or task which was undertaken during this past year and led to the presentation of the Statutes which were composed from the suggestions of the various National Associations and the General Council of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Now the text which was studied during the meeting is in its final stages of review and will soon be sent to the Holy See for approval.

At the meeting in Paris the following persons were present for all the sessions: the superior general and the delegates from twenty-six nations (a total of sixty people). The delegates came from Australia, India, Thailand, the Philippines, Chile, Peru, Cameroon, the United States, Mexico as well as other American, African and European

nations. Twenty-one of these delegates were priests, fourteen were Daughters of Charity, two from other religious Congregation and twenty-six were lay women or men. At the opening session, after the greeting by the Superior General, the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Èvelyne Franc warmly greeted us and expressed the love which the Daughters have for the Association of the Miraculous Medal. All the sessions were held in the Assembly Hall of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity where we were attended with great care. The majority of the group spoke Spanish but there was also a good representation from the English, French, Polish and Portuguese speaking nations. Thus these languages were used throughout the meeting and the Sisters from the Motherhouse provided us with simultaneous translation. Yasmine Cajuste, the International President of the Vincentian Marian Youth, made a presentation to the delegates (her theme: The place of the Vincentian Marian Youth within the Miraculous Medal Association) and also helped in the translation.

During our meeting we traveled one day to Fain-lès-Moutiers, and celebrated the Eucharist in the parish there. There we renewed our Baptismal promises at the same font where Zoe Catherine Labouré was baptized. It was very emotional to be able to renew our commitment as children of God in the same place where Zoe Catherine Labouré was born to new life.

All the participants have recognized that these have been grace filled days and have deepened our commitment to the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

WELCOME FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AT THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE AMM

Paris, 16 November 2009

Allow me to say once again to all of you: WELCOME to this “International Meeting of the Association of the Miraculous Medal”! We are calling this an “international meeting” because we have not yet developed our Statutes and so we cannot call this a “General Assembly.” After this Meeting, whose objective is to elaborate our General Statutes, we will be able, in the future, to hold General Assemblies, with the next one coming in about five or six years from now, depending on what we decide during these days.

In his letter inviting you to this Meeting, Father Enrique Rivas, Sub-director General, mentioned that these would be very special days because during this time together we would be talking about something we care about very much, and he was right. We are here together because of our love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, and at the same time, because of our dedication to our beloved Association of the Miraculous Medal.

Throughout this entire year, we have been celebrating our Jubilee, a time of gratitude to Mary for the message given through her appearance to Saint Catherine Laboure. This is also a time to give thanks for the Church's approbation of the Association one hundred years ago. Our hope is that in this meeting we will be able to consolidate the Association of the Miraculous Medal. This will certainly require serious work on our part as we strive to establish clear general guidelines for our Association, which will be represented through our General Statutes.

Statutes, like Norms or any other written document designed to give guidelines to an Association or a Congregation, are a result of extensive experience. I can attest to the fact that Father Rivas has been hard at work, along with us on the Council, with regard to all that is contained in this fundamental document of the General Statutes that we have today. We have reviewed repeatedly the various contributions that some of the countries had sent in, although the participation was small in comparison with the total number of countries, fifty-three, in which the Association of the Miraculous Medal exists. These contributions are valuable, and we have tried to incorporate all those that seemed significant in the development of the Statutes.

Once again I would like to speak about this reality of the Association's existence in different places in the world and in various cultures. We are not attempting to create uniformity in the Association. Rather, we hope for a sense of unity in the various expressions and approaches relating to our devotion to the Miraculous Medal, and in our methods of spreading its message in different countries.

In addition to the work, which will require effort and which we hope will involve the participation of all those present here, so that we will have a document that truly comes from the grassroots level, we hope that this will also be an opportunity for us to pray together as an Association. Here in our Religious Seat, which is rue du Bac, we have the opportunity to deepen our love for Mary and be strengthened and renewed in order to carry this message to all those who are open to hearing about God's love, through the love of his Mother Mary.

May our time together also be an occasion to get to know one another better, for we are an International Association, and most likely we know most about our own Association in our local area. Perhaps we have some familiarity at the national level, but as an International Association, our hope is to create connections among one another so that this message might become universally known. In this way, we can show that the love that we have for Mary our Mother and her Son, Jesus Christ, is manifested in our love for the entire world.

We hope that this will not only be a time for work, prayer and getting to know one another, but also an opportunity to enjoy being together as sisters and brothers, members of the Vincentian Family. The happiness that we share and that grows ever deeper among us comes from the same joy that Mary expressed at the moment of her Magnificat, when her greeting to her cousin Elizabeth came forth from their experience of love for one another, as well as the love between the two infants within their wombs. May our time together be an opportunity to express the joy of knowing that we are loved by God.

I would only add that this is what we will strive to put into practice through all that is presented to us here. I am certain that Father Enrique will assist us in staying on task in our participation in each of these activities. I am very pleased to be able to be present with all of you; we are all members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, members who have the right to speak and dialogue among ourselves, whether we are priests, Daughters of Charity, or committed lay members in our Church. This is a characteristic that is unique to our Association, for this is the branch of the Vincentian Family in which there is full participation of members coming from all vocations. We will demonstrate to the rest of the Vincentian Family our ability to work together as a team and as an International Association, in order to carry out our responsibility of continuing to promote love for Mary our Mother and love for her Son Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, I ask Our Lord to help us to be faithful to our Jubilee theme: "One hundred years journeying with Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, with gratitude and creativity." May this celebration be a time of gratitude, and may Our Lord fill us with creativity so that this special mission that has been confided to us may long continue. God bless you all.

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

GREETING FROM THE SUPERIORESS GENERAL AT THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF THE AMM

Paris, 16 November 2009

Dear Fathers, Dear Sisters and Dear Friends,

This morning, your meeting officially opened with the Eucharist presided over by Father Gregory, our Superior General and your Director General, followed by his introduction. It is now my pleasure to welcome you here, not only in my name, but in the name of all the Daughters of Charity. All the Sisters here in the Motherhouse are also very happy to have you with us. Some of our General Councillors are present with you this morning, including Sister Iliana Suarez who serves as the link between your Association and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

A warm welcome to each one of you very specially, the lay members, priests and Sisters who participate in this wonderful Association, as you gather **at the very site of the Apparitions** of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine Laboure. In fact, in this Chapel visited by so many pilgrims, everyone feels Mary's welcome. A young woman once said to me: "*Mary not only visited here, she is still here.*" It is true, Mary draws all her children to her, by some mysterious instinct, not to hold on to them, but to lead them to her Son: "*Come to the foot of this altar.*"

I like to think that during these days of reflection, **the Blessed Virgin will also be seated here among you**, here in this room, to listen to you and communicate to you the inspirations you need each time that you ask her for them. And even though this meeting is particularly focused on developing the Statutes for your Association, Mary will know how to give you the missionary fervor and energy needed to be able to discern how to best formulate these statutes, in fidelity to the mission confided to the Association as part of the Church of the third millennium.

I am sure you will also be spending time in prayer in **the Chapel**, in order to absorb the meaning of the message that Mary confided to Saint Catherine. It is a "treasure" of extraordinary grace and power, and there is no limit to what we can discover in it for our world today.

I take the opportunity, as I welcome you, to reflect with you a moment on **the person of Saint Catherine**. For all of us, she is not only a privileged witness to the Blessed Virgin, but also someone who lived out Gospel-inspired love in her everyday life, in an extraordinarily Vincentian way.

Beginning when she was a young girl, Catherine was open to God's presence, and at the age of nine, the death of her mother was a key step in her spiritual journey with Mary. Her attentiveness to poor persons was also a priority for her from a very young age, as she would refrain from food in order to share it with sick persons in her village.

At the age of 24, Catherine became a Daughter of Charity. Besides being chosen by Mary to be her messenger, Sister Catherine lived out the Vincentian charism simply but authentically in her daily life. Her priority was the service of poor persons, service that was fed and strengthened by a deeply spiritual and Eucharistic life.

Today, this young woman's manner of living is a call for *young people* to choose the pathway of active charity with a balanced lifestyle, a pathway of holiness in everyday life.

Through the simplicity of her life, Saint Catherine also has a connection with *ordinary people*. She leads them to turn their attention towards Mary and Jesus "purely and simply" and to place themselves at the service to their suffering sisters and brothers.

Every vocation of service to God and the neighbor, including the lay vocation, can draw inspiration from the witness of Saint Catherine's life. She appeared "*as the first to witness to a new form of holiness, one without human glory or triumph, that the Holy Spirit was beginning to bring forth for modern times*" to quote the writings of Father Laurentin.

In our Company, to speak of Saint Catherine is also to be on a level with **our Founders**. It is fitting to note that today, **the Jubilee celebration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of the Founders coincides with the 100th anniversary of your Association**. Does this not demonstrate the complementarity of the Association and the Company, and at the same time, suggest some calls for our current world? The Medal continues to be a gift that God offers our contemporaries today as well as an invitation for us to witness to the ever-renewed strength of the Gospel in the face of the challenges in our world. It invites us to whole-heartedly involve ourselves in building a world that is more just and more loving.

My friends, I confide your gathering to Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Catherine, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. May they help you, and help all of us to re-energize our specific charism within the Vincentian Family so that it might always be at the service of those most in need, and that together, we might know how to witness to God's tender love to persons living in poverty.

ÈVELYNE FRANC, D.C.
Superioress General

The Association of the Miraculous Medal: A Uniquely Vincentian Association

by Enrique Rivas Vila, C.M.

Perhaps this article's title will draw some attention. When we talk of the various branches of the Vincentian Family we usually line them all up, distinguishing one from the other by each branch's purpose, or by what it does or by its foundation date or church approbation, or perhaps by how important it may have been to the development of the other branches, such as the case could be for the Congregation of the Mission or the Daughters of Charity. Actually each branch has its own unique personality even if they all have much in common, having sprung from the common Vincentian foundational charism.

By pointing out the AMM as a "unique association," we want only to highlight what it is in its own identity that distinguishes it from the other branches. It is the only Vincentian Association to which all members of all the other branches can belong, whether they be laypersons, priests, vowed members or members of an apostolic society. Indeed, one would have to say that *everyone* belongs, consciously or not. It is enough to have received the Medal of the Virgin, carry it, and invoke Mary with the same ejaculation that she herself taught us. These are the conditions for being an Association member, according to St. Pius X's pontifical approbation. In fact, all of us Vincentian Family members have received the medal at one time or other during our lifetimes.

ITS MOST CHARACTERISTIC MARKS

1. It is an Association born out of a mystical experience

Catherine Labouré was a woman who grasped the presence of the sacred. She herself, years after the Apparitions, narrated the story of these many experiences of the living God. Thus in her writings she states:

“The day of the Most Holy Trinity, Our Lord appeared to me as a King, with the cross over his breast, in the Blessed Sacrament. This happened during the Eucharist, at the Gospel. It seemed to me that the Cross was sinking below the feet of our Lord and it seemed that He was being stripped, all adornments falling to the ground.”

“I was favored with another great grace, that of seeing Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I saw him all the time while in Seminary, except at those times when I doubted. Then, the next time, I did not see anything because I wanted to go deeper and had doubts about this mystery. I was thinking that I had been mistaken.”¹

The manifestations of the Virgin Mary that gave origin to the Medal of the Immaculate Conception exist in this world of interiority and encounters with God along with the invitation to found an Association in order to reveal and spread the message that had been received.

1.1. Catherine tells the story

We have heard it many times. Told by Saint Catherine, repeated on many occasions at the behest of her spiritual Directors, her story describes three apparitions where she heard the message that brought about the Medal and everything having to do with it.

In the first apparition, occurring on the night of July 18-19, 1830, the Holy Virgin Mary, with a gesture of motherly concern, welcomed Catherine into a long conversation during which she encouraged Catherine to be open to the task she wanted to entrust to her.

The second apparition, on the afternoon of November 27 that same year, revealed the means to transmit the message. Just like a great designer, Mary sketched the face side and reverse side of the medal in a language that would make sense to simple people, for anyone willing to take refuge in the power of this perfect summary of all of salvation history.

The third apparition, at some undetermined date, dealt with the final touches on the iconography of the Virgin holding globe of the world in her own hands thus suggesting that she is the sure way to the encounter with God.

¹ R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *Catherine Labouré et la Médaille Miraculeuse. Documents authentiques. 1830-1876*, Paris, Lethielleux, N° 564, p. 335.

1.2. An Association fully designed by the same Virgin Mary

Mary wanted to pass on her message through an Association. It would be the expression of all which the Medal contains. Perhaps everything really began from that point on. It was Mary herself who asked Sister Catherine Labouré, “tell your Director that an Association be founded....”

Catherine tells the story this way:

“I remember that one day I said to Father Aladel: ‘The Holy Virgin asks of you a mission. She desires that an Association be started, and you are to be its founder and director. The group will be a Confraternity of Daughters of Mary, to which Holy Virgin will grant many graces. Indulgences will be given them. They will be very happy.’”²

1.3. With a clear purpose: to spread a message

In the context of the apparitions, the Association requested by Mary seems to be the fitting means to carry to everyone the message that she brought us from heaven.

The message is in the Medal. Everything is about the Medal. It is the means through which graces are poured out, just as the seer repeatedly reminds us. These graces undoubtedly refer to the participation in the divine life which we are offered once we open our hearts to Jesus’ message. In reality, the Medal is a call to the encounter with the mystery of Jesus, expressed in the Cross which fills up the whole reverse side of the medal, and which sets hearts on fire. This is expressed by the two flaming hearts appearing behind her, clearly identified as icons of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, an invitation to identify oneself with this flaming love that consumes them.

The characteristic emphasized on the medal’s reverse is that this cross lovingly comes to us through Mary, since it lies over a large “M,” clearly referring to the Mother of Jesus, Mary of Nazareth.

This is what Saint Catherine tells us when she describes the apparition of November 27:

“Then there appeared the Holy Virgin as an oval image on the front side of which was written, in letters of gold, these words: ‘O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.’ Then there was a voice that told me: ‘Have a medal minted based on this model. All those who wear it about their

² R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *o.c.*, n° 637-638, p. 357.

neck will receive great graces. The graces will be abundant for those persons who carry it with faith...'

Suddenly, after having contemplated this image, it seemed to me to revolve and I then saw the reverse side of the Medal."³

"Concerned to know if it would be necessary to add something on the Medal's reverse side and after have prayed a great deal, I seemed to hear one day in meditation a voice that told me: 'The M and the two hearts say enough.'"⁴

Sister Catherine herself suggests that the Medal is a language that must be read. And this is how the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Èvelyne Franc, explained it in her intervention at the last Synod of Bishops, in 2008:

"The miraculous medal offered to so many people in the world is a simple tool for catechesis, a summary of the history of salvation which allows for the proclamation of the Word of God."⁵

2. An Association

And so, the Medal in itself is a sufficient means to approach the mystery of Jesus Christ, for the heart of anyone who welcomes its message and understands its content, feeling the impulse to share that content with others. The important thing, however, is that the Blessed Virgin invites the creation of an Association to transmit the message.

To speak of an Association presupposes to highlight the union of persons with a purpose of fulfilling an objective. It is a call to gather together in order to coordinate a common task.

2.1. Its constitution, requested by the Church

Since 1832, the epoch when the Medal began to spread out and graces multiplied for those who had received it. Above all, since the publication of St. Catherine's confessor, Father Aladel, to respond to questions that had come from so many people as well as those in the Church⁶ concerning the Medal's origins, associations started

³ R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *o.c.*, n° 455-456-457, p. 295.

⁴ R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *o.c.*, n° 455-456-457, p. 296.

⁵ Intervention of Sr. Èvelyne Franc in the Synod of Bishops, October 14, 2008. *Ecos de la Compañía*, 6 (2008), 391.

⁶ [J. ALADEL], *Notice historique sur l'origine et les effets d'une nouvelle médaille...*, Paris, 1834.

appearing spontaneously in response to the Virgin's invitation to better live out the Gospel in true Christian communities according to the spirit and style of that time.

Many such associations were founded. Some, like the one at St. Ginés parish in Madrid, were founded ten years after the apparitions. Don Juan Carreras, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission since 1837, established an association in the Church of San Luis de los Franceses, in 1840; in 1845, however, given the small size of the church, the association was moved to the San Ginés Parish. Pope Blessed Pius IX, in 1848, recognized it, leaving the faculties to approve their statutes to the Cardinal of Toledo, which he did on May 10, 1849. This Association eventually took on the title of "Royal" granted by Queen Isabel II in 1855, since the whole royal family belonged to it.⁷

The creation of these Associations continued throughout the rest of the XIX century. In 1847 the Holy See approved for Paris an "Association of the Holy Medal of the Immaculate Conception," which was dedicated particularly to the girls and young women of the colleges of the Daughters of Charity.⁸

But there were associations that, in their spontaneity, had very little in common with other associations; in addition, in many cases they were influenced by some spiritual trends that were completely foreign to the message of the rue du Bac. Nor were they helped much by church structures that constituted and approved them in any way they saw fit to do so.

In face of this reality, by the end of the XIX century the superiors of what has since been called "the double family of St. Vincent de Paul," that is to say, the Vincentian Missioners and the Daughters of Charity, decided to intervene to attempt to coordinate and move forward "the" Association about which the Virgin had spoken and whose creation she had entrusted to a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, Father Aladel.

The Vincentians took this on as their own task and, at the same time, a unified project, since the Virgin had not spoken of Association in the plural but rather in the singular, one which should be the custodian of how the message was shared.

⁷ BENITO PARADELA, C.M., *El culto y la devoción a la Milagrosa en España durante el siglo XIX*, in *Anales C.M. Madrid*, 43 (1935), 609-614. MARIANO TORRES, *La Archicofradía de la Medalla Milagrosa en la Parroquia de San Ginés de Madrid*, Madrid, 1946.

⁸ JOSÉ DELGADO, C.M., *Mensaje de la Rue du Bac*, Madrid, 1968, pp. 181-187. Trae una amplia bibliografía sobre el tema.

It is clear that the Virgin spoke of one association of “daughters of Mary.” This never was understood in the restrictive sense, since “daughters” and “sons” of Mary are all Christians. Perhaps the expression could be read in the sense in which the Virgin Mary invites us to feel ourselves authentically her “sons and daughters,” fully trusting in her word and message just as any child would do with their mother or father.

This multiplication of Associations that had been established throughout the XIX century compelled the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity at that time, to try to unite and strengthen all those associations into a one and only Association. To this end papal authority was requested of the pontiff at that time, St. Pius X, in order to bring about this unification and approbation.

And, to that effect, the Pope issued a decree of approbation and gave the Association its first Statutes.

2.2. Subsequent Approbations

That was the first Church approbation and a determining factor for later development of the Association, which reached great heights as far as the number of groups and members. In addition, it lived through its first and most difficult crisis through its activities during the Spanish Civil War and World War II, along with the recuperation that came after these conflicts.

a) *The approbation of St. Pius X (1909)*

There is one precedent in St. Pius X's approbation in 1905, at the behest of the bishops of Poland, of an association with the name “Society of the Immaculate Conception of the Sacred Medal.” Perhaps this inspired the petition presented in the name of the family of St. Vincent.

Fr. Antoine Fiat, C.M., Superior General of the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity from 1878 through 1914, went to the Pope to ask that he make an approbation which would apply to all the Church. And, in effect, through the Brief *Dilectus Filius*, issued July 8, 1909, the Pope approved that very society definitively and universally.

b) *The originality and the force of the 1909 approbation*

In that Brief, the Pope gave the Association some statutes, summarized in seven articles, which constituted all other Statute written afterwards on both the national and international levels.

The originality of these Statutes can be seen in these characteristics:

- This is an Association “of the faithful,” so that, in accordance with Canon Law, all the faithful of the Church, be they priests, vowed or laypersons, (cf. Art. V) are able to belong.

- The condition for belonging to the Association is “to carry the sacred medal suspended from the neck over one’s heart, blessed and authorized by a priest with that faculty, and according to the rite approved by our predecessor, Leo XIII...” (ibid.). It is not necessary to register the name in any record (cf. Art. VII, & 3°).

- Members take on no obligation; it suffices to repeat frequently the invocation carved in the sacred medal: “O Mary conceived without sin...!”

- Perhaps most important in the history of the Association is that its supreme authority remained tied to the person of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, since, as the same Pope confirmed in his document, he does so “as much to look to the unity of the Association as for its perpetuity” (cf. Art. VII, & 2°). The authority that binds together and gives unity to the Association is not in the base of the association, nor in any democratic process of decision-making, but rather it is the person of the Superior who will always exist, call it what you will, who, as the Pope says, will give permanence to the Association. This papal decision is one of the characteristics of uniqueness of the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

c) *The Statutes of 1998*

Logically the adaptation of the juridical texts the teachings flowing from the Vatican II Council, presuppose a Statutes revision. In 1990 the Holy See approved some modifications. That same year a new rite of blessing and imposition of the Medal was approved.

But the International Statutes approved by Pope St. Pius X, marked by his conciseness, ended up inadequate when facing the complexity of the life of the Association in so many different cultures and countries. For those reasons some new International Statutes were proposed and were approved by Rome on February 19, 1998.

In those:

- They continue to recognize that this is an association of the faithful, i.e. with members who are ordained, vowed, and lay, and for which reason that it is not just a lay organization. This is very logical because anyone to whom the medal has been given and who wears it, fulfills the condition be a part of the Association as stated by Pope

St. Pius X in the 1909 approbation. Therefore, in the Association there can be lay members, religious, those consecrated by vows, priests, and even bishops.

– They continue to affirm that their Director General is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, to whom belongs the naming of the national Directors or Presidents and who, for the same reason, act in his name.

– There is a very important distinction when speaking of the members: it distinguishes between members in general and special members (Art. 4, nn. 1 and 2).

Those are “members in general” who carry the Sacred Medal blessed by a priest, etc.

And “special members” are those who have been inscribed in the Association... understood as those who carry out activities proper to the Association in whatever way; and in this sense too, a priest or religious man/woman or Daughter of Charity could be “special members” of the Association just like a layperson, with the same rights and duties described in the Statutes, as long as they participate actively in the works of the Association.

d) *New International Statutes*

For a few years now the International Council of the Association has thought it was the right time for a new adaptation of the International Statutes, because of its expansion into new countries and cultures. In only a few years it had moved from being established in 20 countries to 53, with plans for new foundations in even more countries. In addition, there is the reality of many legal lacunae in important areas making redefinition necessary for smooth and proper operation. For this reason the previous International Council had designed a project, since then adapted for today, where national Associations were studied with the intent of presenting a text for study and analysis at the International Gathering. This took place in Paris in November, 2009. Now that text with those meeting’s reflections is undergoing final revisions in the Commission for Redaction, so that it can be proposed for approbation by the Holy See.

The central ideas behind the proposed text for these new Statutes are very simple. The first is to find total consistency and continuity with the Virgin’s idea, but in the context of the Church and the world today. The second has to do with being faithful to the directives delineated by the Church in the successive approbations, but especially in that of Pope St. Pius X, in 1909.

That original continuity requires that we foster that climate of prayer and contemplation in which the desire of the Virgin Mary was grasped, as expressed to St. Catherine Labouré; for that reason and, for the first time in any Statutes, one whole chapter appears, dedicated to the Spiritual Life.

Mary's desire that a C.M. Father be the founder of the Association presupposes a clear linkage with the Vincentian charism. Evangelization of and service to our brothers and sisters, especially to those who are poor, from the perspective of Vincentian contemplation of the face of Christ, is one proposal for this Association to thrive within our Vincentian Family.

The second continuity moves us to rediscover an Association made up of the faithful. This means that each and every one of us is a protagonist — we are the main actors. Apart from the unique role of the Director General, clarified in Pope St. Pius X's request that this be the Superior General and who for that reason has to be a priest, all other roles and responsibilities of the Association can be carried out by any of its members, be they priests, consecrated or laypersons. This applies to all offices, the National Director or the presidents or whichever other task; these are roles that can be carried out by a Daughter of Charity or a C.M. missionary or a layperson or any religious, male or female. It is not any person's status but rather the quality of that person that makes it possible to carry out the function.

Should it happen that the AMM ever define itself merely as a lay association, the priests — C.M. or diocesan, Daughters of Charity or religious men and women — would then logically be unable to carry out any function other than as spiritual advisors or consultants. The possibility is prevented in the ongoing project of new Statutes, and falls within the logic of the juridical definition of the 1909 and 1998 Statutes.

3. The AMM, Today

3.1. A Social and Ecclesial Reality

We do not have Church or international statistics. We do know that we have many thousands of associates. In Spain alone, to cite an example, last year all members and groups were counted in order to estimate the reach of the Association's evangelizing activity. In October 2008 we had 33,897 members (special or active) in 444 groups or associations, each month reaching 249,518 homes with the message inviting them to provide their home-chapel for the visits of the Virgin, and the contact with those families that receive it. We are established in practically the majority of Spanish dioceses.

Much of the same thing, with higher or lower numbers, could be said of Mexico, Peru, Cameroon, India, Australia, Venezuela, the United States, etc... of all those countries where the Association has taken root.

In many countries, the Association is an organization that gathers its members periodically for prayer, formation and reflection, bringing members together for feast days, fiestas or shrine pilgrimages, for active Vincentian service to the poor, etc. These happen with regularity, that is sometimes quite frequent such as weekly, or more occasionally such as once a month, or during the important liturgical seasons.

In other countries, the Association relies on a logistical center of communication and information, maintaining this relationship by ordinary mail or by other information media with many thousands of persons who have given their names to the AMM; at a distance, it shares information, prayer journals and requests, the celebration of novenas, participation in mass intentions... etc. Rarely do these members gather together, but they do feel connected to the Association through the central coordinator.

These are the only kinds of statistics we have for the moment. Even so, the important thing is the dynamic which these groups and the Association's members are living.

3.2. Expectations

The celebration of the International Encounter of the AMM which took place in Paris, November 15-20, 2009, as well as that which presumably was learned and communicated among those participants who attended from so many countries, has opened up expectations for the future of the Association and raised them higher. The fact of having together studied the text of new International Statutes for the AMM has helped discover essential points of convergence in those areas where all of us are involved, while, at the same time, keeping in mind the differences in how things are actually carried out, depending on the country.

These fundamental characteristics that constitute the essence of the AMM are picked up in these Statutes; they apply to the whole Association and, for that very reason, they are meant to be the basis for Statutes proper to the AMM in each country.

One would expect these Statutes to strengthen the Association, consolidating in their basic directives everything needed to guide all its proceedings; but there is also a more focused dynamic for the program sketched out by the Virgin Mary in St. Catherine's apparitions. These, in today's world and church, can and should be

understood as a much more intense commitment to evangelization and service by means of the great catechesis of the Medal itself. This, along with the members' involvement in a serious spiritual life, lived out in the joy of fellowship, in communion with each other, and with the experience of deepest gospel love, ought to be the witness and sign which the Association could offer to today's world.

All in all, the International Gathering of November 2009 dealt with the Statutes. But now we hope for Church approval not only for the juridical text but also for the directives and characteristics which we studied and decided to propose as guidelines for the Association in the near future. The 1909 Statutes elicited an ample response which was translated in the creation of many Association groups and a vitality so remarkable that even today the historical testimonies from that time are surprising. We all hope that the gift of some new Statutes, something the Association itself actually formulated during this Gathering, be the occasion of a new life-giving phase, remaining faithful to Mary's great gesture of trust in 1830, and re-enchanted for today.

I would like to offer, as my conclusion to this article, the fundamental directives of the proposed Statutes. Although not yet approved by Rome, these directives already represent a large part of our reflections and how we hope to strengthen the AMM with their help.

3.3. The aims of the AMM

In the new Statutes, the text for approval says in its article 8:

“The Association has as its end:

- To follow Jesus Christ by the example of Mary, disciple and model of Christian life.
- To spread Marian spirituality by using the message of the Miraculous Medal.
- Sanctification by means of Holy Communion, a spiritual life and the apostolate.
- To serve and evangelize. In general, this is an apostolate of evangelization and charity to families, responding to their most urgent needs and poverty. This mission is exercised primarily by means of the Home Visits, development programs and the celebrations proper to the Association.”

Keep everything that matters — this has kept the AMM alive over the years. We know now that it is clear that the AMM is really about an encounter with Jesus Christ, through Mary. A part of this task is personal salvation, understood as evangelizing and serving; these are the top priorities for the whole Association and for each one of its members.

3.4. Characteristics that define the AMM

There are some characteristics that we want to use to clearly define the identity of the AMM. They were spelled out in previous Gatherings, and we believe that they should continue to be.

a) *The Ecclesial Characteristic*

- Since all its members, from their baptism, are called to participate in the salvific mission of the Church in communion with other Catholic organizations and under the direction of their pastors.
- Because the fulfillment of all its ends is linked to the mission of the Church.
- Because it has been approved and recognized by the Church.

b) *The Marian Characteristic*

- Because they share a Christian spirituality that has a distinctly Marian dimension.
- Because the Association rose, born out of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830.
- Because all its members feel called to know, live, and spread the message of these apparitions of 1830.

c) *The Vincentian Characteristic*

- Because the Association has been born from within the Family of St. Vincent de Paul, whose charism is the service and evangelization of the poor.
- Because the direction of the Association has been confirmed by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

3.5. Its own virtues

These are the expression of its own essential characteristics, and the work in which the Association intends to highlight as living force for its members.

The Association is energized by its practice of the four virtues or basic activities that express the spirit proper to it. These four virtues spring from the Message from the apparitions and are taken up by each and every one of the Association's members in their efforts to fulfill what has been entrusted to them by the Virgin Mary, and what they have been charged to do.

These virtues are: to pray, to live in communion, to evangelize, to serve Christ in their brothers and sisters, especially those who live in poverty.

a) To Pray

The Medal, the key and expression of the complete Message of the Apparitions, is an ongoing invitation to prayer: the ejaculation is very explicit, in this sense: “O Mary, conceived without sin: ‘Pray’ for us who have recourse to thee!” and the symbols drawn from the Medal open us to continuous contemplation of the great mysteries of salvation.

But there is more: that same Virgin Mary invites us to approach the altar in order to meet ourselves in prayer, as brothers and sisters.

Prayer and contemplation are necessary for our groups.⁹

b) To Live in Communion

The Blessed Virgin asked that an Association be created. The invitation to spread her message presupposes to do so as a group, in authentic Christian community. Community is constituted in brotherly love. This is not about a merely external association, helped along in superficial bonds and relationships. The power of the Association resides in the Christian love that gathers it together. It will be in the value of “See how they love one another!”

For this reason, the Association fosters gathering together for its members in knowing one another, in sharing one common spirituality based on the ideal of one apostolic project. Meetings for formation and prayer, gatherings on the diocesan or national levels, *romerías* (street processions), pilgrimages, and so on, all these are good to strengthen such a gathering of the heart “in its depth” which the authentic spirit of communion presupposes.

c) To Evangelize

Mary requested that we spread devotion to the Medal. This is her catechesis. And this is “our” catechesis. More and more we make it clear that presenting the Medal is not to present a miraculous image or talisman. It is to catechize, to give while explaining the content

⁹In reality, this is one thing necessary for every Christian, just as Benedict XVI recently pointed out: “Mystical knowledge and experience of God is not something reserved to exceptional people but rather is for all the baptized.” General Audience celebrated in the Paul VI Salon, Wednesday, September 16, 2009. The AMM assumes, encourages and sets up for its members this mystical experience of God.

of its message which is none other than the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It cannot be given out without catechesis beforehand. Whoever receives it should understand the meaning of each symbol that Mary placed on it. In this way they would speak about her and help others to draw close to Jesus of Nazareth.

d) To serve Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially those who live in poverty

We are convinced that the Virgin Mary appeared to a Daughter of Charity for the very reason that all that encompasses a Daughter's vocation is precisely Jesus Christ serving the most Poor. This was a message for the Poor, for those of simple hearts, able to understand without refusing, and to accept by means of the authority offered. The wider Family, composed of all those who feel inspired by the charism of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, understood it this way from the moment they knew of the apparitions and their message.

The Poor, the sacramental image of Jesus Christ, are the beneficiaries of the Message. The Association knows well that it is their servant.

Within this Vincentian way of thinking, we assume that our task and all our gifts, no matter what kind they be, are totally at the service of people in need. For this reason, activities of material service to the poor are justified, and gathering funds for these development projects and programs, and even to having the Association involved institutionally in a parish's charity program, or similar organizations as occurs in many cases. As well, these activities happen in collaboration with other branches of the Vincentian Family in service of the poor.

The Association understands quite well that it is a Vincentian Association, because the Virgin desires it so. The different branches of the Vincentian Family (Daughters of Charity, Vincentian missionaries, the AIC [Ladies of Charity], Vincentian Marian Youth, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Vincentian Lay Missioners, etc.), each born from the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul — something they have tried to realize and live out in every moment of their history — have always interpreted the Virgin's message to a Daughter of Charity as a call to everyone who lives out the charism of "Service to Jesus Christ in the Poor," or Vincentian charism, so that they would transmit the message of the Medal especially to the Poor and those of simple heart. For this reason, the Medal belongs to everyone, and each member of any branch of the Vincentian Family can also be a member of the AMM.

As a Vincentian Association, the AMM lives out a great concern for the Poor. For this reason, from the Vincentian charism's perspective, not only is the message spread out, but also is concretized in many projects to help others, especially those in great need, financed with whatever help it receives, especially offerings collected during the Home Visit of the Virgin or through letters through the mail. There are many projects to help others, economic assistance or personal assistance, undertaken on all levels to bring about systemic change, both on the global level as well as through service and attention to the most needy on the local level.

3.6. The apostolate of the AMM

The traditional apostolate of the Association has gradually taken form in two ways: in the cultic services in honor of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, and in the Virgin's Home Visit to houses.

a) *The celebrations*

From the beginning the Association has cultivated celebrations both liturgical and popular devotional in honor of Most Blessed Mary. Novenas, triduum, feast days, street processions, the monthly celebration of the 27th, remembering the monthly date when the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830. The Association has always nurtured these activities, taking care to find a priest who, by his preaching or with his reflections, could evangelize the faithful and solemnize public functions. This is still happening today.

There are Sanctuaries which are centers of these AMM devotions. Through them they keep in touch with members who often live large distances away, such as occurs in the United States, in France, in Australia. The connection happens by means of mail, with the sending of donations and intentions, or the reception of bulletins and instructional flyers.

b) *The Home Visit*

Since 1915, when the practice started in Teruel (Spain) of carrying to homes small glass cases displaying the image of the Miraculous Virgin, there have been thousands of home altars which, in a humble but direct way, conveyed a message to families who welcomed this practice one day a month in their homes. How many stories could be told about how the simple presence of the Virgin, in this image, could touch hearts whether they be of her fervent children, her distant children, or even those reluctant to receive her at all. There

are thousands of stories, many found in our magazines, with others known only to her and to those involved.

It would be difficult to find any organization, civil or religious, with such a large and frequent forum for communication. The Association intends to share that message, not only with the presence of the Virgin's image — which is much in itself — but also by means of bulletins, pamphlets, ministerial invitations to prayer, etc., directed at the families visited in addition, to inviting those families to formation talks, catechesis, prayer, and to group celebrations on the 27th of each month and Novenas, Triduums, and Pilgrimages, etc.

The Home Visit exists in many countries, especially in Latin America, where sometimes the daily transfer of the image from one house to another presupposes a true procession with the image of the Virgin carried on *andas* (handheld processional platforms).

One great concern for the Association is to rightly guess about how to do these things well and effectively, in a way consistent with contemporary family Catholic teachings and faithful to the basic catechesis of the Medal.

4. Looking toward the future

Formation concerning the Association's own existence and purpose is possibly the greatest challenge we have today. For a long time now the association developed to fit in with the times and to provide for the spiritual needs of its members. It could have easily fallen into pietism or into an activism centered on easy pastoral activity, such as would have been to carry over a past epoch's home visit altars, or its few people who were participating in a Christian environment, or to do nothing other than just keep on passing out medals. This does not mean that we should be sorry for what has happened. Home visits have produced much good fruit. But now perhaps we need to update this practice to make it not only more suitable for today's Church but also to restate that very same evangelizing message from those apparitions for our own times.

This Jubilee Year of the AMM, convened by the Superior General and just closed this past November 20th in Paris, hopefully has been an occasion to reflect on the AMM's history, now one century. We also hope that this has disposed hearts toward a distant horizon, because the Association still has much to do today and in the future. We rely on the Blessed Virgin's very first urging: "Let an Association be founded..., to which the Holy Virgin will grant many graces. They will be showered with indulgences. They will be very happy."

Associations of the Miraculous Medal in the United States

by James G. Ward, C.M.

It was a “new world,” full of adventure, excitement, risks and dangers, when the first Italian Vincentian missionaries arrived in the United States in 1818. They settled in the small town of Perryville, Missouri, in the central section of the country, about 90 miles south of St. Louis, Missouri. This first house of the “little company” was named St. Mary’s of the Barrens, because of the confreres’ strong devotion to the Blessed Mother. Eventually, in this new land called the United States, two provinces were established: the first in St. Louis (Western Province) and the second in Philadelphia (Germantown), Pennsylvania (Eastern Province). This brief introduction gives us the historical context for the establishment of the two Associations of the Miraculous Medal in the United States. Both have experienced tremendous growth because of the vitality of the faith of immigrants to the United States and the faith of their children and grandchildren.

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

Father Joseph Skelly of the Eastern Province was the first director of the Central Association, which was established in 1915 in Philadelphia. Father Skelly was director for over 35 years. Promoting devotion to Mary Immaculate and the Miraculous Medal Shrine was done in thanksgiving for favors received in helping to build St. Joseph Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey in 1912. For many years St. Joseph was the preparatory (high school) seminary where young students began their Vincentian preparation for the priesthood in the Eastern Province.

In 1927, four annual novenas were started to celebrate four special feasts of the Blessed Mother: Our Lady of Lourdes, Mary Queen of Heaven, the Assumption, and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. In 1930 the weekly Monday Novena was started. Only the Novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal has continued. This Monday

devotional has been prayed continuously without interruption to this very day. This reality is referred to as the “Monday Miracle.” The shrine was started in 1875 and completed in 1879. The statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal was added in 1927.

Today, Masses and novena services are celebrated every Monday, in keeping with the rich tradition of the shrine in the East. Confessions are heard at all Masses and services. Also, at these, the novena prayers are prayed, religious articles are blessed and new members are enrolled with blessed medals. The Miraculous Medal Shrine also contains a shrine to the “Virgo Potens” and a crypt chapel with Eucharistic Exposition. A small gift shop distributes medals and articles of devotion.

The promotion and devotion of the Miraculous Medal is an apostolate of the Eastern Province. Two confreres and approximately 20-40 lay staff are active in this apostolate. The present director is Father Carl Pieber, ordained in 1980 and appointed to his position in 2007.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

One hundred years after St. Mary’s of the Barrens was established, the Association of the Miraculous Medal was begun in 1918 in Perryville, Missouri. Father William Musson was the first director and the seminarians handled the clerical work. Other confreres served brief terms as directors until 1926. In 1926 Father Joseph Finney was appointed director and served for 36 years. He was one of five brothers from New Orleans. Four entered the Congregation, were ordained to the priesthood and served in the Western Province.

In 1928 under the supervision of Father Finney, a new shrine was built to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. The new shrine was constructed inside the historic St. Mary’s of the Barrens Church, which was begun in 1827 and dedicated in 1837. Two stained glass windows near the ceiling of the shrine depict the first two apparitions of the Blessed Mother to Sister Catherine. The large dome over the shrine has a painting of Sister Catherine distributing the Miraculous Medal.

Today, Masses and novenas are prayed on Monday at the Church of St. Mary’s. Confessions are heard. The shrine church is also the site for the gatherings of the Vincentian Marian Youth. This group is part of the Vincentian Family, and it is devoted to sharing our Catholic faith and fostering Marian devotion among our young people. On the campus of St. Mary’s there is also a gift shop and a museum of Vincentian memorabilia.

In past years and today, the generosity of the donors of the National Association assists the confreres in the formation of men for the priesthood and brotherhood, the care of elderly missionaries and the works of the confreres in mission areas. The Association in the West is an apostolate of the Mid-Western Province of the United States. One confrere and approximately 65 lay staff are active in this apostolate. The present director is Father James Garcia Ward, ordained in 1977 and appointed to his position in 2009.

THE FUTURE

With the changing life-styles and demographics of the people of the United States, both Associations are seeking to meet the needs of the Catholic community. In the East and West, as the Associations strive to promote devotion to Mary, conceived without original sin, they continue to reach out to various groups, especially the Hispanic community (over 40 million in the United States) and young Catholic adults who are more comfortable with computer/electronic information. Just as in 1818, there are new adventures and new risks as the confreres continue this ministry and work, given to the Congregation in 1830.

STUDIES

The Miraculous Medal

A Proposal for Interpreting
the Message and Role of the Vision of the Virgin with the Globe

by Waldemar Stanisław Rakocy, C.M.

“You have made notable, well-researched, unprecedented analyses. The advantage of this study is to present a new, coherent, solution.”

RENÉ LAURENTIN

This study is made up of five sections as follows:

1. The vision of the Virgin with the Globe
2. The symbolism of the back of the medal
3. The symbolism of the front of the medal
4. Historical conclusions
5. The theological message of the medal

INTRODUCTION

In 1830 a novice of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Catherine Labouré, received the grace of meeting the Blessed Virgin on at least three occasions.¹ According to her own account the second vision took place on 27 November 1830, and in the course of it she was told to have a medal struck with an image of the Blessed Virgin

¹ See R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré et la Médaille Miraculeuse*, Paris 1976, pp. 71 ff. Compare R. LAURENTIN, *Fecha, número y autenticidad de las apariciones de la Medalla Milagrosa*, in: *Las apariciones de la Virgen María a Santa Catalina Labouré* (Various authors), Evangelizare 13, Salamanca 1981, pp. 72-102.

distributing divine graces, and the inscription: *O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you* on the front, and on the back the letter *M* surmounted by a cross, and underneath these a pair of wounded hearts, those of Jesus and Mary. The vision was repeated at least one more time, in December 1830.² The minting of the Medal in 1832 and its subsequent popularity gave rise to many miracles, especially cures and conversions;³ that is why it came to be called “miraculous.”

At the time the Medal was made available Sister Catherine was not at ease. It was on 27 November 1830 (and again in December) that she saw the Blessed Virgin holding in her hands a globe surmounted by a cross, enveloped in rays of graces streaming from rings which she wore on her fingers. In the following years Catherine was upset that this vision was not reproduced on the Medal.⁴ As far as we know, once the Medal was minted and widely circulated her confessor, Father Aladel, did not want to re-open the matter. It was only in the final year of Catherine’s life (1876) that, according to her instructions, a statue was sculpted by D. Froc-Robert illustrating that vision.⁵ If this vision was not immediately accepted it was because it was different from what was on the front of the medal: in the former the Virgin holds the globe of the earth in her hands, while in the latter she has her hands stretched downwards and the globe is under her feet.

All who have studied this question stress the difficulty of reconciling the two images. Some have tried to resolve the problem by supposing that there were two successive stages in the vision, the vision of the Virgin holding the globe in her hands, and then the vision of the front and back.⁶ In that way they posit a certain development in the apparition (a sequence of images and content). Others suggest that, after the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, Catherine immediately saw what was on the back.⁷ In that case the

² LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, pp. 85-86.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 39-69.

⁴ See 1.2.a., below.

⁵ A photograph of it is on p. 83 of LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*.

⁶ The best examples are: [J. CHEVALIER], *La Médaille Miraculeuse. Origine – histoire – diffusion – résultats*, Paris 1878, pp. 74 ff; L. MISERMONT, *Les graces extraordinaires de la bienheureuse Catherine Labouré*, Paris 1934, p. 107; E. CRAPEZ, *Le Message du Cœur de Marie à Sainte Catherine Labouré*, Paris 1947, pp. 34 ff.

⁷ R. LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique de Catherine Labouré*, vol. 2: *Preuves*, Paris 1980, pp. 183-187. The same author: *Descripción de la aparición y Virgen del Globo*, in: *Las apariciones*, pp. 103-124, especially p. 117. This possibility is not excluded by I. ZEDDE, “Lettura dottrinale della Medaglia Miracolosa

present front was the work of Aladel and those whom he consulted (especially Fr J.-B. Étienne), basing himself on the then usual way of representing the Blessed Virgin as conceived without sin. So it is the vision of the Virgin holding the globe which should have been on the front. There are some who, like Fr P. Coste, deny the vision of the Virgin with the Globe (just Catherine's imagination).⁸

The first aim of this present study is precisely the problem mentioned above, which gives rise to certain doubts. The theological message of the Medal remains the principal purpose of this study. The matter as a whole will be developed on the historical and theological levels.

The analyses which follow will be based on an un-packing of the sources published in Laurentin's two volumes: the first, quoted above, was with Roche's collaboration; the second was entitled *Procès de Catherine* (Paris 1979). Apart from these, another work by Laurentin will be referred to.⁹ Most studies present mainly the pastoral aspect, and do not pay sufficient attention to historical precision with regard to the facts to be described.¹⁰ With the passage of time the authentic evidence was overlaid with stories which were not there at the time of the apparition.¹¹ It is therefore indispensable to base oneself on sound information in order to attain the reality of the matter.

alla luce della storia della salvezza," in: *Annali della Missione* 88, 1981, No. 3, p. 236.

⁸ See his *Mémoires* (unpublished); also LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, pp. 35-37. In the article *La Médaille miraculeuse (Annales de la CM 95: 1930, pp. 453-564)*, written at the time of the centenary of the apparitions, Coste gives the facts as generally accepted, without revealing his personal opinions.

⁹ *Vie authentique*, vol. 1: *Récit*; vol 2: *Preuves*.

¹⁰ MISERMONT, *Les graces extraordinaires*; CRAPEZ, *Message*; J. GUITTON, *Rue du Bac ou la superstition dépassée*, Paris 1973 (especially chs. IV and V); W. ŁASZEWSKI, *Cudowny Medalik. Klucz do skarbnicy łask [The Miraculous Medal. A Key to the Treasure of Graces]*, Częstochowa 2004; I. Zedde proceeds differently (*La Medaglia Miracolosa. Il dono della madre*, Roma 2005); in an article of a similar type he believes in being historically correct but pastoral reasons prompt him to pass over in silence some historical questions.

¹¹ Some of these, though they are the stuff of legend, may in fact be true. Such, for example, is the case of the description of the serpent, which is greenish with yellow spots, as referred to, for example, by Crapez (*op. cit.*, p. 35) or Łaszewski (*op. cit.*, p. 22). On this matter see: **Historical Conclusions e**, point 4.

1. THE VISION OF THE VIRGIN WITH THE GLOBE

It has already been mentioned that right at the start of the apparition of Mary on the 27th of November 1830 Sister Catherine saw the Blessed Virgin holding in her hands the globe of the earth, as well as seeing the rays shining from the rings on her fingers.¹² The account given by her is rather enigmatic in the description of the move from the vision of the Virgin with the Globe to the Medal;¹³ available evidence confirms that she grasped the meaning of the apparition without explaining its development. We will begin our study by explaining precisely the significance of the white half-globe under Mary's feet. With regard to Coste's opinion, dealing also with the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, we will give a response only after having worked through a theological study.

1.1. The Theme of the White Half-Globe

Sister Catherine states that during the first phase of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin she saw under her feet "a white globe, or at least half of one";¹⁴ she does not, however, give an explanation of it, as she does for the globe held by Mary in her hands. We can take it that she either did not know, or was not sure, what the half-globe meant.

A commonly-held opinion is that the white half-globe must symbolise the earth.¹⁵ That is how Mgr B. Thiel will report the matter to Pope Leo XIII.¹⁶ Chevalier, quoted above, while taking the white

¹² Some authors find it odd that the rays shining from the rings on Mary's fingers are spreading out in the opposite direction with regard to the globe held by her (see LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, pp. 78 ff.). This problem will be dealt with below in **Historical Conclusions**.

¹³ See the 1841 accounts in Catherine's handwriting in LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-296. From now on, each time there is reference to quoted sources in that work, as well as in the second volume *Procès de Catherine*, only the initials of the section will be given, DChD (Dossier Chronologique des documents). The numbers in the first volume run from 1 to 664 (DChD 1), in the second volume from 645 to 1029 (DChD 2). (However, each volume has its own pagination!).

¹⁴ The handwritten accounts of 1841 and a handwritten note of April 1876, in DChD 1, Nos. 455 and 456 (pp. 292-293), and also Nos. 635-636 (p. 351) (the final document on the December apparition).

¹⁵ CHEVALIER, *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 78; CRAPEZ, *Message*, p. 50; see also the evidence of Chevalier dated 17 June 1896 (PO, sess. 10), in DChD 2, No. 878 (p. 200) as well as the notice of Sister Geoffre in the necrology, dated 1 January 1878, No. 655 (p. 90).

¹⁶ DChD 2, No. 718 (p. 127).

half-globe as symbolising the earth, refers to Catherine's own words (to be developed below in 1.2.b.), where she says that she saw, in the developing of the apparition of the Virgin with the Globe, a globe of the earth under her feet. The white half-globe, understood as meaning the earth, explains why the rays were mainly directed downwards. It is accepted, of course, that the earth later appeared under Mary's feet, but one does not, at the same time, believe that it was the same white half-globe which the sister had previously seen. It is difficult to accept that the white half-globe under her feet is really the earth, for it would be necessary to agree that the idea of the earth, present when Mary was holding the globe in her hands, was there twice in the same appearance of the vision (a doublet of the same symbol).¹⁷ On top of that, why would the globe of the earth be shown once in white and once in gold, at the same moment in the same picture of the vision?¹⁸ According to Catherine's account, and how Chevalier, quoted above, understood her, the white half-globe underwent a change, that is to say that an unspecified¹⁹ half-globe became the earth, clearly seen (with the serpent). As regards the rays being directed downwards, Catherine wrote, in 1876, that they were spread out in all directions;²⁰ in observing this phenomenon she noticed that they were directed downwards because she was struck by the fact that their light shone over Mary's feet and the entire lower part of her stance.

We can accept that what Sister Catherine saw under Mary's feet was, indeed, the half-moon; there is reference to it in Rev. 12:1. The moon is the body ruling night time and, together with the serpent, symbolises the powers of evil. That sort of representation of this vision exists; it is the classic way of portraying the Immaculate Virgin.²¹ To say that the white half-globe under Mary's feet is indeed a half-moon is a way of not duplicating the symbol. With regard to the half-moon there is some doubt about the white colour of the half-globe. The half-moon in the pictures representing the Immaculate Virgin is more of a silverish colour. Is it the shining light which suggests that the colour is white? It is hardly likely that a

¹⁷ Compare LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, p. 78.

¹⁸ With regard to the golden globe in Mary's hands, see a note of Catherine's from Spring 1876, in DChD 1, No. 632 (p. 345).

¹⁹ Even Chevalier (*Médaille Miraculeuse*) recognises that, as regards its being the earth, it "had an indefinite appearance."

²⁰ DChD 1, No. 635 (p. 351).

²¹ A sketch made by Letaille in 1841, with a note attached referring to it, in DChD 1, Nos. 460 and 461 (pp. 300-301).

divine intervention brings secondary effects, disturbing the previous symbolism. Moreover, in representations of the Immaculate Virgin, with the moon under her feet, we see the lower half-globe but not the upper one.

The difficulties in interpreting the symbolism of the half-globe cause certain authors to avoid the matter; others think it is not of any importance with regard to the message of the apparition.

At last it is time to give a completely different interpretation. The white colour in Sister Catherine's two visions symbolises innocence. That is also the case in the vision of St Vincent's heart,²² and also the later vision of a Cross.²³ In the first of these Catherine takes the white colour to be a sign of union (and also of peace and calm). With regard to Mary, the white colour means her innocence, the fundamental message of the Medal, her conception without sin. The second meaning of the colour white, in the vision of St Vincent's heart, means the union of Mary with her Son through the divine maternity (on the back). The two qualities, innocence and union with the Son, stem from the heavenly glory of the Blessed Virgin and her mission, shown on the occasion of the apparition.

It is to be noted that in all the descriptions given by Catherine of the vision of the Virgin with the globe in her hands, the Virgin's clothing is dominated by the colour white ("clothed in white"), which is to say that she is wearing "a dress of golden-white silk" and "a white veil."²⁴ Catherine does not say anything about the mantle which, in our opinion, did not form part of the Virgin's clothing at the time of the apparition.²⁵ The appearance of the Blessed Virgin, in the vision in which she is holding the globe, shows a composition in white harmonising with the white half-globe.

In our opinion the white half-globe represents, in a symbolic way, Mary's conception without sin and her union with the Son, which is the fundamental point of her mission shown in the vision in which she is holding the globe.²⁶ The disproportion between the dimensions

²² Handwritten account of 1856, in DChD 1, No. 564 (p. 335).

²³ Letter to Aladel in 1848, in DChD 1, No. 544 (p. 324).

²⁴ DChD 1, Nos. 455-456 (p. 292) and also Nos. 635-636 (p. 351). We are giving the correct version; in the original text there are mis-spellings such as *abilliez, vetue et voile*. With regard to the white veil, see another account below in **Historical Conclusions, c**.

²⁵ See **Historical Conclusions, i**.

²⁶ The fact that in the vision there is a half-globe and not an entire one is explained by Mary's sharing in the glory of God (her mission comes from Him): He remains the sole fullness of perfection.

of the white half-globe and the small golden one which she holds in her hands becomes obvious; by reason of her maternal relationship with the Son of God Mary far outpasses the whole of redeemed humanity.

The above outlined position of the Blessed Virgin agrees with Catherine's wish that Mary be praised as Queen of the World. That is how Catherine understood her image in the vision in which she was holding the globe.²⁷ The same idea of a globe, held by Mary in her hands, was understood by Catherine as the "Blessed Virgin offering" redeemed humanity "to our Lord."²⁸ That is definitely the central theme of the vision: Mary, by reason of her exaltation, of her immaculate conception and her divine motherhood, presents to the Saviour the world redeemed by Him, because she is its queen. Mary's rank and mission stem from the reasons given above (innocence and union with the Son of God), and were symbolically explained by this image in which she is supported by the white half-globe.

1.2. The Vision of the Virgin with the Globe and the Front of the Medal (Unfolding of the Apparition)

We mentioned in the Introduction that certain authors are doubtful whether Sister Catherine, on 27 November 1830, saw Mary with her arms extended downwards, as she is at present shown on the front of the Medal. This demands that we give our personal point of view before continuing to develop the study.

a) *Sister Catherine's Notes and the Evidence of Witnesses*

In going through Catherine's notes about the apparition of 27 November 1830, two notes written independently in 1841,²⁹ we get the impression that the vision of Mary holding the globe in her hands was followed by the vision which at present is on the back of the Medal. There is no trace whatever, even in the notes written later by herself, that Mary had her arms stretched downwards. The mention of the invocation cannot be quoted in support of the posture of Mary on the front; someone who is not acquainted with the Medal might believe that the inscription and the vision of the Virgin holding the globe in her hands make up one single unit.

²⁷ Handwritten account from Spring 1876 in DChD 1, No. 632 (p. 345).

²⁸ Handwritten note from April 1876 in DChD 1, No. 635 (p. 351).

²⁹ DChD 1, Nos. 455-456 (pp. 290-296).

Even if Catherine were not intending to change the content of the front of the Medal³⁰ she was, at the same time, convinced that Aladel's way of showing the Virgin did not correspond to the apparition; that is confirmed by some persons, and firstly by Fr J.A. Chinchon,³¹ Catherine's confessor during the last quarter of her life (apart from the final year). In his evidence, given at the Informative Process for the beatification, he stated that Catherine had regretted that the posture of Mary, on the front, did not properly represent what she had seen during the apparition. He tried to convince her that her first confessor, Aladel, had perhaps believed that it would be too difficult to represent on a medal Mary holding a globe in her hands slightly forwards. During the same process Fr J. Chevalier,³² in whom Catherine confided, made an identical statement. He stated that during the last year of her life Catherine had declared to him, as Assistant Director of the Daughters of Charity, that she had received extraordinary graces. According to him she regretted "the alteration" introduced by Aladel. Chevalier also stated that he did not understand the reasons why Aladel "had suppressed" from the Medal the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, in other words he did not accept it. To explain this he expressed a desire to simplify the front, which may have been caused by pastoral reasons, and even political ones.

That is how Sister Dufès, Catherine's superior in Enghien, reported to Sister Tanguy her conversation with Catherine on this point, confirming that Catherine was convinced that the vision of the Virgin with the Globe should have been on the front.³³ This conversation took place in the year of Catherine's death, and the main point of it was the vision of Mary holding the globe in her hands. Sister Tanguy's evidence is reliable: Sister Dufès reported the conversation to her on the day on which it took place, with Catherine's permission.³⁴ Sister Tanguy reports her informant's citing Catherine's words that the Blessed Virgin was not shown "exactly" on the Medal, that is, not as she had appeared to her, and further "as long as I live I will always say that that is how the Blessed Virgin appeared to me," that is, with the globe in her hands.

³⁰ "Oh, we must not touch the Miraculous Medal": statement of Sister Tanguy, 24 May 1897 (PO, sess. 24) in DChD 2, No. 906 (p. 229).

³¹ Statement of 19 January 1897 (PO, sess. 17), in DChD 2, No. 894 (p. 219).

³² Statements of 17 June 1896 (PO, sess. 10) in DChD 2, No. 878 (p. 201).

³³ Statement of 24 May 1897 (PO, sess 24) in DChD 2, No. 906 (pp. 228-229); see also the statement of Sister Consard of 28 December 1897 (PO, sess 34) in DChD 2, No. 932 (p. 252).

³⁴ PO, sess. 24 in DChD 2, No. 906 (p. 228).

With regard to Sister Dufès, she seemed embarrassed by this matter and avoided answering the question during the Informative Process. Instead of that, we find in her statements a report on the sculpting of the statue of the Virgin with the Globe, which was a lifelong mission of Catherine, during the year of her death; at the time she told her superior "It is the martyrdom of my life."³⁵

b) An Attempt to Explain the Discrepancies Between Catherine and Aladel

We ask the question: Was the vision of Mary holding the globe in her hands immediately followed by the vision which nowadays is on the back of the Medal? Firstly, according to the statements of Frs Chinchon and Chevalier, and Sister Tanguy, it is by no means clear that there never was a vision of Mary with her hands extended downwards (Aladel's invention), but perhaps simply that Catherine never noticed it. Secondly, it is difficult to solve this problem if we rely solely on notes made by Catherine. Her accounts are not complete; for example, there is no mention even of the earth under Mary's feet, nor of the serpent. All her emphasis is on the vision of the Virgin with the Globe (see **Historical Conclusions d., e. and f.**). Thirdly, the notes of the most important of the witnesses, Aladel, Catherine's first confessor, are useless. His official accounts, published in the *Notice Historique*, are very different from Catherine's account, and are deliberately so (*ibid*, **f., g. and i.**). There are very few of his private notes, and they are not of much use.³⁶

In the past authors such as Chevalier, Crapez or Misermont tried, with varying results, to prove that there were no substantial discrepancies between the accounts of Catherine and Aladel. The most professional critique of the unravelling of the problem, the above-mentioned work of Laurentin and Roche, states that any attempt to harmonise the two accounts is impossible.³⁷ We share this opinion: that is why we believe research from a different angle is necessary.

For this reason we recall a very valuable account by Chevalier,³⁸ which gives a departure point for the solution of the problem. It was in him that Catherine confided about the apparition of the Blessed Virgin. In his book, when he is giving an account of one of his conversations with Catherine, he writes that in answer to the

³⁵ Statement of 18 May 1896 (PO sess. 6) in DChD 2, No. 874 (p. 186).

³⁶ CHEVALIER, *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 66.

³⁷ *Catherine Labouré*, p. 82.

³⁸ *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 78. The same account is quoted by Sister de Geoffre in DChD 2, No. 655 (p. 91).

question whether she still saw the globe in Mary's hands at the moment when "the waves of light were springing out from all sides," she said that at a certain moment "there remained nothing except the rays," so that as soon as the Blessed Virgin was speaking about the globe she "indicated" the globe which was under her feet; there was no longer any question of the first one (the one she had been holding in her hands); it had disappeared in the rays of light.³⁹ The fact of the globe of the earth remaining under the Blessed Virgin's feet, after the globe in her hands disappeared in the rays of light, gives a piece of very important information. We may doubt whether Chevalier properly understood Catherine with regard to the unfolding of the apparition, or whether she expressed herself with enough precision; anyway, it seems difficult to accept that there could be a mistake as regards the position of the globe of the earth after the "disappearance" of the globe from her hands; it was under Mary's feet.

Sister Catherine's written accounts do not contain any mention of the globe of the earth under Mary's feet; (her accounts are not complete; see above). On the other hand, we read in them that, when she saw the Blessed Virgin, Mary had a white half-globe under her feet and that she was holding the globe of the earth in her hands. She then noticed rings on her fingers, from which rays of light sprang (divine graces). A very bright light covered her feet and "all the lower part,"⁴⁰ including the white half-globe (at least to a considerable extent, for that was what supporting Mary's covered feet). The globe of the earth, however, was visible all the time in her hands. The Virgin then turned towards Catherine, who heard an interior voice. When she heard Mary speaking about the globe of the earth it was obvious that she meant by that the globe she was holding in her hands. The remainder of the account deals with the command to have the medal minted.

So, basing ourselves on these two pieces of evidence from Catherine (one through an intermediary, Chevalier) we are going to attempt to reconstruct the way the unfolding of the apparition of the Virgin probably took place.

At first sight the accounts of Catherine and Chevalier are contradictory with regard to the location of the globe of the earth. Let us begin with what is common to both accounts. The accounts of Catherine and Chevalier agree about an intensification of the light which partially obliterated the stance of Mary. According to

³⁹ CHEVALIER, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁴⁰ The account and note from 1841 and 1876, in DChD 1, No. 455 (p. 293) and No. 632 (p. 345).

Chevalier the Virgin indicated the globe of the earth under her feet at the moment when Catherine no longer saw the globe in her hands. Catherine, however, speaks of the globe, visible in Mary's hands, that is, before the disappearance of the rays of light. It becomes obvious that, in Catherine's notes and in the account quoted by Chevalier, two different moments in the apparition are being referred to. The second describes its ultimate phase, not dealt with in Catherine's notes. We can therefore conclude that the covering of "all the lower part" and the globe of the earth remaining visible in the Virgin's hands (a moment described by Catherine) changed subsequently: the globe in Mary's hands became invisible, while the globe of the earth appeared under her feet (Chevalier's account).

The unfolding of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe should be considered on three levels: the lower part (Mary's feet resting on the white half-globe); the central part (the globe of the earth held in her hands at the level of her heart); and the upper part (Mary's face).

During the vision of the Virgin with the globe in her hands, an exceedingly bright light at first covered the lower part so that Mary's feet were no longer visible, nor was the white half-globe (Catherine); then it was the central part which was covered, and the globe of the earth appeared under her feet (Chevalier). The globe in her hands was no longer visible, and it was not behind the bright light, because when Mary was addressing Catherine she was thinking of the globe of the earth under her feet; there was no longer question of the globe in her hands.⁴¹ Otherwise, we would have had a doublet of the same symbol (see 1.1. above). The unfolding of the vision up to that point also confirms that the globe of the earth was not concealed in the Blessed Virgin's hands behind the bright light. When Catherine sees a globe in Mary's hands there is a white half-globe (imprecise) under her feet; later when the globe of the earth is under Mary's feet Catherine no longer sees it in her hands. If the white half-globe is not the globe of the earth (everything seems to indicate this) we have no knowledge of such a phase of the vision where the two globes would be present at the same time. Such an unfolding of the vision suggests that not only were they not visible at the same time, but also that they were not present at the same moment.

A presumption which claims that the globe in the hands was hidden all the time in the bright light (a symbol of humanity flooded by graces) is tenable up to the moment when the globe of the earth is

⁴¹ "[...] and there was no longer any question of the first" (CHEVALIER, *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 78).

not yet under Mary's feet. As soon as it appears, this interpretation is no longer viable.

At this stage we formulate a conclusion which is the foundation of the analyses which are to follow: *The unfolding of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin set out above proves that there was a phase (before the appearance of the back of the Medal) during which Mary was not holding the globe of the earth in her hands; it was under her feet.* In the following section we will call it the "median" phase (between the vision of the Virgin with the Globe and the vision of the back of the Medal).

We will now ask a question about the moment when the "median" phase of the vision began. Our starting point is the moment when the completed image took on, according to Catherine, an oval appearance (the shape of a medal) and an invocation appeared. Catherine locates the two facts after the very bright light covered "all the lower part" and immediately before the apparition of the back. According to the account, the vision of the Virgin with the globe in her hands had already lasted a certain time when she saw an oval frame. If the image of the front revolved into the back, the former must include the final phase before the appearance of the back, in other words the "median" phase, namely the vision of Mary with no globe in her hands and the globe of the earth under her feet. This permits us to formulate a new important conclusion: *the image which Catherine saw, which was going to be perpetuated on the front of the Medal, must include the "median" phase.*

The fact that the "median" phase formed part of the vision of the front does not automatically mean that the oval shape (shape of a medal) appeared after the disappearance of the globe from Mary's hands. The image seen could have become medal-shaped during the vision of the globe in the hands, and then include the "median" phase. Given the sources, this is not to be excluded. But the content of the back would then be ambiguous (two different images). Such a possibility could be accepted on condition that the light shining on the central part did not fade until the "median" phase was over.

The conclusions already reached permit our asking the question about the presence, in the course of the apparition, of the vision resembling, or identical with, the image on the front of the Medal. We proved already the presence of the earth under the Blessed Virgin's feet and the absence of the globe in her hands during the "median" phase (concerning the vision of the front). So, what was the position of her hands? If Mary was no longer holding the globe her arms should no longer remain in the same position as previously. A question arises: what would be the point of the covering, and the disappearance of the globe from the Virgin's hands and its

appearance under her feet? It is certainly a transformation of the image which is going to move on to proclaiming a new message. In spite of the absence of the globe from Mary's hands, the rings on her fingers would not cease spreading the rays of light (see Chevalier). If we take this fact into consideration, the attitude of her hands resembling, or identical to, that on the front of the Medal seems possible. In that context, it is interesting to note Chevalier's account, which says that Mary took "various attitudes" during her apparition.⁴²

Why, then, does Catherine make no mention of it anywhere? It seems, furthermore, that she expressed her reservations in a different way. In order to reply to this question we must decide whether the central level, covered by the bright shining light, was uncovered again before the change to the image on the back, or not. We have already proved that the white half-globe was not the later globe of the earth (see 1.1.), which means that, on the lower level, behind the shining light, a transformation took place: a change from the undefined white half-globe into a definite globe of the earth. This means that at the lower level the covering of the central part could have been to allow the transformation of the image of the globe in Mary's hands (it disappeared). If the globe of the earth appeared under the Virgin's feet, in place of the white half-globe, we cannot exclude that the central level was also uncovered again, and that the Blessed Virgin appeared without the globe in her hands. In both cases the bright shining light would have played the part of a curtain, behind which a transformation of the image would have been produced.⁴³

The account of Aladel's interrogation, drawn up by P[ierre] Quentin, contains a piece of information which could prove a vision similar to the one at present on the back of the medal, as well as a dimming of the light at the central level of Mary's stance. The account states that the invocation "O Mary conceived without sin..." starts at the level of the Virgin's (extended) right hand and,

⁴² *Op. cit.*, pp. 85-86. We do not know if he heard it directly from Catherine, but what is clear is that he formed such an opinion after his conversations with her. "[V]arious stances" does not mean that there were others than those reported by Catherine and Chevalier, otherwise Catherine would have described the apparition differently.

⁴³ We do not know at all whether the upper level was covered again. We must doubt that that took place, because for a certain moment the entire stance of Mary could have been invisible. If, then, she had a crown of twelve stars on her head, in the vision with the globe in her hands, she kept it until the final moment when Catherine saw the back of the medal. A single change on that level is the appearance of the invocation.

passing over her head, ends at the level of the left hand.⁴⁴ But the reliability of this is doubtful. Étienne, who was told about it by Aladel himself (and by him only),⁴⁵ gave evidence three days later (19 February 1836) that the invocation was “at the top” of the vision of the front.⁴⁶ This corresponds well with what Catherine recorded five years later (“at the top”).⁴⁷ Étienne merely reports facts; Aladel’s version is just his own interpretation. He gave Étienne an account of what he had heard from Catherine, whereas with Quentin he probably tried to accommodate Catherine’s account (“at the top”) to what was on the Medal (around the entire posture of Mary).⁴⁸

We accept that the reasons given above are not sufficient to conclude that the central part was again uncovered before Catherine saw the back of the Medal. To give a final answer to this question we must also take into consideration another possibility, namely the possibility of a vision of the front when the light over the central part does not disappear until the apparition of the back. This means that Mary’s posture, with the earth visible under her feet, in the central part (no globe in her hands, and the arms, for example, stretched downwards) was concealed by the shining light. Although this is somewhat complicated, we mention it because it is confirmed by a non-written proof, and better explains the discrepancies between Catherine and her confessor in the interpretation of the vision.

We are referring to a statue of the Blessed Virgin, sculpted, in the final year of Catherine’s life in accordance with her instructions; this is the non-written proof. The statue shows Mary holding a globe in her hands (the vision of the Virgin with the Globe), and under her feet she has the globe of the earth with the serpent (the “median” phase). On the statue the two phases form one single vision! This proves that Catherine understood the “median” phase as an extension of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe (in the sense of the same image). Chevalier’s account proves this. For him, on the lower level the white half-globe and the later globe of the earth are the same thing (1.1.). In this we find agreement with Catherine’s conviction about the unity of the image before seeing the back,

⁴⁴ DChD 1, No. 298 (pp. 235-236).

⁴⁵ DChD 1, No. 299 (p. 240).

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 241.

⁴⁷ DChD 1, No. 456 (p. 295).

⁴⁸ The arrangement of the invocation is the work of a medallist, A. Vachette, who minted the first batch of the Medals (to see them cf. I. ZEDDE - A. ZANGARI, *La Medaglia della Madre*, part. 2: *Iter storico numismatico*, Genova 1980, pp. 66-68; LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique*, vol. 1: *Récit*, pp. 106 & 113).

which probably represents his opinion; he had discussions with her about this.

The proof given above allows us to formulate this conclusion: *If the “median” phase was, for Catherine, an extension of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, that is, the same image, the light at the central part of Mary’s posture was not extinguished until the conclusion of the “median” phase, for otherwise she would have noticed a visible change in the central and principal theme of the vision, namely the absence of the hand-held globe.* Chevalier’s account confirms this, that from a certain moment on, she did not see anything in the central part other than the shining light.⁴⁹ Sister Tanguy’s account has a similar assertion: Catherine was unable to explain what happened with regard to the globe in [Mary’s] hands.⁵⁰ Catherine therefore did not see anything except the rays of very brilliant light springing from Mary’s hands, but she was unable to see what was concealed, (what happened), behind.

This state of affairs allows us to understand Catherine’s perception of the vision: she thought (most probably) that the globe in Mary’s hands remained hidden in the bright shining light,⁵¹ and that the globe of the earth under her feet was simply a continuation of the image of the white half-globe (see the statue of the Immaculate Virgin mentioned above).

The above interpretation explains certain matters: 1) it is obvious why the invocation appears “at the top”; the central part of Mary’s stance was covered by the bright shining light until the conclusion of the “median” phase; 2) We can understand why Catherine never once mentions in her notes the theme of the earth under Mary’s feet (a part of the “median” phase being visible); if, according to her conviction, the apparition up to the moment when she saw the back constituted the same image, the theme of the earth was part of the image of the white half-globe (see Chevalier); 3) Such a state of affairs conforms well to Catherine’s words, that the position of Mary’s hands on the front of the Medal does not correspond (exactly) with what she saw during the apparition of the Virgin.

Something which supports our interpretation above is that an extinction, or a lessening, of the light at the central part of Mary’s posture in the “median” phase brings one of the following

⁴⁹ See note 38.

⁵⁰ PO, sess. 24, in DChD 2, No. 906 (p. 229).

⁵¹ This comes from the account quoted by Sister Tanguy (*idem*); that depends also on how to understand Catherine’s statement quoted in connection with note 41.

conclusions: 1) Catherine must have missed this stage of the apparition of the Virgin (the absence of the globe from Mary's hands); 2) she forgot, or 3) she was deliberately silent on this point. The first does not explain why she missed the same vision for a second time (she repeated herself in the same way at least once, in December 1830).⁵² The second does not explain why she forgot such an important part of the apparition of the Virgin. Her excuses of a poor memory are marginal, and in most of the cases refer only to details (**Historical Conclusions, c.**). The third possibility does not explain why, in her accounts, she passed over in silence this stage of the vision; her reaction to Aladel's attitude does not justify omitting a real element of the apparition.

We can now formulate another important conclusion: *If the central part of Mary's posture remained covered until the end of the "median" phase (with the appearance of the back of the medal), it is not possible to ascertain the precise position of her hands; they could have been stretched downwards or, for example, joined in prayer.* The concealment of the Virgin's hands proves it was not their position that constituted the basis of this part of the apparition, but the distribution of requested graces in the image of the bright shining light (symbol of abundance). Whatever the position of her hands may have been, nothing is changed concerning the fact of the streaming from them, that is to say from Mary's person, of divine graces.⁵³

While avoiding non-documented hypotheses (lacking other sources), we are satisfied with the reconstruction presented up to this point, and we present the developing of the apparition, as confirmed in the sources. During the vision of Mary with the globe in her hands, the bright shining light (symbolising divine graces) gradually covered her stance: at first the lower part, then the central part. At the moment of the covering of the central part, and the lower part

⁵² CHEVALIER, *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 80; see also LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, pp. 85-86. The December vision is described in DChD 1, Nos. 635/636 (pp. 350-352). Sister Pineau's evidence of 27 October 1896 (PO, sess. 15) in DChD 2, No. 886 (p. 213), that during the December vision Mary's arms were stretched downwards is, according to other sources, her interpretation of the events (an attempt to eliminate the discrepancies between Catherine and Aladel) and does not correspond to the facts.

⁵³ The covering of the central part during the "median" phase allowed the vision to take on an oval shape, that is the shape of a medal, during the vision of the Virgin holding the globe in her hands (there is no longer any ambiguity in the image, namely two different images) Given such a view of the matter we may believe that Heaven led Catherine to the conviction that during the "median" phase no change took place. That is why we believe it more probable that the vision took on the shape of a medal as soon as the hand-held globe ceased to be visible.

becoming uncovered, Catherine saw the Blessed Virgin with the globe of the earth under her feet. The central part remained covered until the end (till the apparition of the back). Even if this could not be perceived by the eyes, Mary no longer held the globe in her hands. Her arms may have been in any position: stretched downwards, or joined in prayer. At this moment the image being contemplated (probably) took on the oval shape, and an invocation appeared in the upper part; Catherine heard a command to have the medal minted. Then the image turned around and she saw nothing except the back.

We can, therefore, risk an evaluation of Fr Aladel's contribution to the present form of the Medal, as well as of Sister Catherine's claims about this.

With regard to Aladel's share, if the apparition of the Virgin unfolded as set out above (or came close to it), it does not seem odd that he saw in the vision what is now on the front of the Medal. If, according to Catherine's account, he reconstructed in the same way the unfolding of the event, that is to say that at a given moment the globe in Mary's hands became invisible and nothing remained except the rays of light and, under her feet, the globe of the earth (with the serpent) appeared (in place of the white half-globe); and then, that in the final phase, before Catherine saw the back, the image took on an oval shape,⁵⁴ and an invocation appeared in the upper part, and a command to have the Medal minted was given, the confessor, not even knowing at that moment what was the position of Mary's invisible hands, restored to the front of the Medal what had been seen (the globe under the feet and not in the hands). But, even if the image of the front had started during the vision of the globe in Mary's hands, Aladel well understood that she no longer held it in the phase immediately preceding the appearance of the back (the "median" phase). His contribution is restricted to the supposition about the position of her hands at that moment. Given that Catherine was unable to explain this part of the vision (what took place with regard to the globe), he found a solution in remembering how the Blessed Virgin, under the title of Immaculate, was conventionally represented at that period.⁵⁵ There is no argument about the arms extended downwards; moreover, it is merely a

⁵⁴ The "median" phase was part of this image.

⁵⁵ In spite of this, he expresses himself in only a general way about the position of the hands: Mary ("stretching her hands": DChD 1, Nos. 17, 38 & 52, or "having both arms extended": DChD 1, No. 298). Not even once does he state that the hands were extended downwards. That is how later authors interpreted his words (extended downwards, or towards the ground). It is to

secondary theme which, in accordance with Heaven's intention, remained unseen (the emphasis being on the symbolism of the light).

The fact of accusing Aladel of arbitrary meddling in Mary's apparition, that is, to allege that he introduced an extraneous element into its make-up, does not seem to be founded on solid evidence. (He introduced a merely secondary element; see **Historical Conclusions**). In the light of the analyses used (the "median" phase) the confessor came to a reasonable conclusion about the apparition of the Virgin. We must not, therefore, ask for the reasons why he did not make a decision about the vision of the Virgin with the Globe on the front.⁵⁶

With regard to Catherine, a lack of interest in the "median" phase does not prove that, according to her conviction, there was such a phase during the apparition of the Blessed Virgin. The authors defending the vision of Mary extending her hands downwards believe, most often, that Catherine lacked the vision of the front (she did not see it). As we said already, the vision was repeated at least once (in December 1830). It seems difficult to prove that she again missed the same part of the vision of the Virgin. Neither do we accept the thesis that she forgot such an important part, or kept quiet about it (see above).

It is true that Catherine found it difficult to explain the unfolding of the apparition of the Virgin (see **Historical Conclusions "a"**). That does not mean that we should exclude that she perhaps did not understand certain elements of it. It was her confessor who came to her aid (idem "**b**"): in so far as he was a professor of philosophy he had suitable qualifications. We must not forget that before the apparition of the back, the unfolding of the apparition of the Virgin with the globe in her hands, followed by the "median" phase, were part of a dynamically changing image (Chevalier suggests several postures). There was, though, a stable element in this image, the posture of the Blessed Virgin, which united the two phases. They were strongly linked together, for example, by Mary's voice which was audible the whole time. It is thanks to the accounts of Catherine and Chevalier that we are able to state that Mary spoke to her, starting at a certain moment of the vision in which she was holding the globe in her hands (Catherine's account) right up to the

be noted that Aladel mentioned the downward extended arms to the medallist, Vachette, because that is how he portrayed Mary on the front of the medal.

⁵⁶ Later on, in 1842, he made an effort to show the vision of the Virgin with the Globe (as a picture?) (a sketch done by Letaille; see DChD 1, Nos. 460-461, pp. 300-301), but he gave up, disappointed by a rather unsatisfactory result (CHEVALIER, *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 83). The point of this attempt was to perpetuate the vision of Mary, and not to alter the image on the front.

appearance of the globe under her feet (the account of Catherine's confidant), and then right up till the moment that part of the vision which preceded the appearance of the back: the command to have the Medal minted (Catherine's account). Mary's continuously audible voice, being one of the elements of the vision, allows us to consider the entirety of the vision, right up to the appearance of the back, as one single whole. Given that the "median" phase had no distinct form at its central part, because of the bright shining light, Catherine interpreted this image through the prism of the Virgin holding the globe in her hands. Apart from that, it was the vision of the Virgin with the Globe which made the strongest impression on her.⁵⁷ Anyone other than Catherine who would have experienced the same vision would have probably formed the same opinion as she did.

Why had Catherine no problem in recounting the transition of the image into the vision of the back? It is quite obvious. The content of this phase was not linked to the earlier ones (a new image), and followed in a visible way, namely by revolving the foregoing one.

We arrive, then, at the conclusion that Catherine interpreted the vision in her own way; Aladel interpreted it in the context of his relationship with her, also in his own way. As regards Catherine, she did not (fully) understand what was happening in the so-called "median" phase (the disappearance of the globe from her hands, and therefore an alteration in the position of Mary's arms, and, in addition to that, the globe of the earth under her feet was no longer the previously-seen white half-globe). This influenced her perception of the "median" phase in as much as it was a prolongation of the preceding image; according to her account, then, it was the vision of the Virgin with the Globe which should be on the front.

Aladel was aware of a new image (the "median" phase) and, according to him, that is what constituted the image for the front, independently of the position of Mary's invisible hands (a secondary theme). We think Aladel's interpretation is correct, because he was not hampered by not fully understanding, and therefore could reflect on the historical fact.⁵⁸

Going on with this point, we can state that between the vision of Mary with the globe in her hands and the vision of the back of the Medal, there was the so-called "median" phase. Therefore, that the "median" phase, (rather than the vision Mary holding the globe in

⁵⁷ See DChD 1, Nos. 455-456 (pp. 292-294), and also No. 635 (p. 351).

⁵⁸ The problem of the position of Mary's hands still remains unresolved. We will deal with it extensively in **Historical Conclusions**, point "j."

her hands) was seen as part of the front. It was, then, right that the globe of the earth on the front of the Medal, should be under Mary's feet and that she should not be holding the globe in her hands. We are not, however, certain (just some level of probability) of the exact position of the invisible hands. Basing ourselves on an analysis of existing sources we formulate the final conclusion about Catherine's dissatisfaction: she complained not only about Aladel's publicising something which, according to her, did not constitute the major element of the phase of the apparition which came just before the appearance of the other side (the globe of the earth under Mary's feet and not in her hands), but also that he had arranged for the front of the Medal to show the Virgin in an attitude (arms extended downwards) which she was not certain had been shown in the course of the apparition.

1.3. Two Points About Mary's Mission, in the Vision in which She is Holding the Globe.

The analyses used up to this point allow us to undertake a theological investigation which will be worked out in points 2, 3 & 5. In presenting the Blessed Virgin in the vision in which she is holding the globe, we note two aspects of her mission to the world.: 1) Catherine understood the apparition of Mary holding the globe as one in which, in this gesture, she was offering humanity to the Lord (point 1.1.): 2) she interpreted the rays of light springing from Mary's hands as graces for the world, requested by her.⁵⁹ The two positions follow one another in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe: Catherine sees first the Blessed Virgin holding the globe in her hands; then, after a certain time, the rays of light start springing from her hands. Mary's mission appears under two forms: in the name of the human race she addresses the Lord (she offers him the globe); 2) in the name of the Lord she addresses the human race (the distribution of graces). This twofold aspect of Mary's mission, in the vision in which she is holding the globe, is confirmed by her countenance: when she makes the offering of the human race she raises her eyes towards Heaven (relationship with the Son of God);

⁵⁹ Catherine's handwritten accounts, as well as a letter, manuscript and text in Aladel's *Notice Historique*, in addition to accounts based on his own testimony, and that of Étienne, to the delegate of the Archbishop of Paris, Quentin, during the Ordinary Process, in DChD 1, Nos. 455-456 (pp. 294-295), No. 632 (p. 345), No. 635 (pp 351-352); then No. 17 (p. 200), No. 38 (p. 209), No. 52 (p. 219), No. 298 (p. 235), No. 299 (p. 241), No. 368 (p. 264).

when the rays of light are already springing forth from her hands she lowers her eyes and looks towards Catherine (relationship with the human race).

This means that in the sequence of images she first presents the human race to the Lord, then a shower of graces happens. This allows us to interpret the gesture of offering: the Blessed Virgin presents the human race to her Son, in order to ask Him for graces for humanity. Finally, the graces are given to people, as symbolised by the rays of light springing from her hands.⁶⁰ The spread of the graces was increasing (the light becomes more and more brilliant); they bring victory over evil (the serpent under Mary's feet). The request for graces for redeemed humanity, by means of the gesture of offering the globe to her Son, links up with the period of combat with enemies whom one meets on the road towards the heavenly homeland. It is in this sense that the "median" phase, which follows the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, is a continuation of it with regard to the content of the message; the graces asked for lead on to the overthrow of Satan. We probably should consider the gold of the globe held by Mary in the sense of the value put on redeemed humanity by the Son (and by his mother).

We are convinced, and we intend to prove it, *that the mission of the Virgin with the Globe, in both its aspects, is reflected on both faces of the Medal: the distribution of divine graces to humanity (on the front) and the offering of this humanity to the Lord (on the back)*. The two aspects, with respect to the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, are shown on the Medal separately and contrastedly. Firstly, the image of the victory over Satan, due to the graces which have been granted, is a concrete visualisation of the prayer heard during the vision of the Virgin with the Globe (the rays of light). We will speak of this again in this study, as well as about the significance which the gesture of Mary's offering humanity to the Lord takes on the back (the second aspect). If, on the Medal as it was revealed, this gesture follows the request for graces (on the front), this means that it is no longer the same gesture as that in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, but that this gesture receives a new content.

Thus the Medal evokes the two themes, joined by the double aspect of Mary's mission in the vision in which she is holding the

⁶⁰ Chevalier (*Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 82) is acquainted with the account of the expression on Mary's face in the vision in which she is holding the globe, namely "gravity mingled with sadness, which disappeared during the vision [...] when the face shone out with a radiant brightness of love, especially at the moment of her prayer."

globe, namely innocence and union with her Son (indicated by the white half-globe). The two aspects of the Blessed Virgin's mission will be the subject of our analyses in the context of these two themes

2. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BACK OF THE MEDAL

The apparition of the Miraculous Medal was recognised by the Church as the heavenly wish that the Mother of God be praised on earth as being conceived without sin; this is expressed clearly in the invocation. Were it not for this inscription the entire content shows the results of her immaculate conception rather than herself. We start our analysis of the theological content of the back of the Medal because it involves a theme which directs our thoughts directly to the vision of the Virgin with the Globe. A correct understanding of the back is, in our opinion, a key for understanding the whole message of the Medal. Independently of the historical process of the formation of the Medal as it now is, already mentioned and to be returned to later, its present appearance will form the basis of the theological analyses.

The commentators on the symbolism of the back of the Medal⁶¹ most frequently see, in the image of the hearts, the sufferings of the Mother associated with those of her Son. In the letter M and the cross on top of it with a horizontal bar underneath they see a perfect union with her Son in the entirety of his life. In the twelve stars they see a symbol of the Church. The back of the Medal should include a paschal aspect, namely suffering.

2.1. The Symbolism of the Letter M and the Cross with a Bar Underneath it

a) *Attempts at Explanation*

The theme of the letter M and the cross on the bar seems evident enough to commentators on the Medal (see note 61), — apart from a horizontal bar supporting the cross. As evidence of this there is an

⁶¹ The authors quoted in this note do not always agree on all the themes on the back of the Medal. See A. ZANGARI, *Simbologia della Medaglia Miracolosa*, Genova 1976; E. CID, *La Medalla Milagrosa, expression gráfica de la mariología*, in: *Las apariciones*, pp. 161-189, especially pp. 169-177; A. FEUILLET, *La doctrina mariana del Nuevo Testamento y la Medalla Milagrosa*, in: *Las apariciones*, pp. 191-232; V. DE DIOS, *Milagrosa (Virgen de la Medalla)*, in: M. PÉREZ FLORES - B. MARTÍNEZ - A. ORCAJO - A. LÓPEZ (eds.), *Diccionario de espiritualidad vicenciana*, Salamanca 1995, pp. 370-377, especially pp. 373-374; ZEDDE, *Medaglia Miracolosa*; compare also CRAPEZ, *Message*, pp. 51-52.

interpretation of the bar as the capital letter "I," signifying the name "Jesus,"⁶² as an image of the perfect union of Mother and Son,⁶³ or passing it over in silence.

Following out the first suggestion, Bomba makes a link, by means of one single expression, to the iconography of primitive Christianity (of the fourth century), without, however, citing sources. It is Zingari, already referred to, who tries to put forward evidence of that sort. We find, though, that in reality there is not any. The horizontal or transverse bar is present in certain iconographic signs (for example, with the letter P: at its centre, and even at its tip), but never at its base.⁶⁴ In the known examples it forms, with the vertical bar, the sign of the cross. In the case of the Greek cross, the horizontal bar (its arms) sometimes indicates the name of Jesus, but we do not know of any examples where the monogram of the name of Jesus is found at the base of the cross. All we accept is that the arms of the Greek cross form the monogram of the name of Jesus (the letter "I"), and that the entire cross is certainly the monogram of the name of Christ (the Greek letter "X").

When we look at elaborations of the problem, such as H. Leclercq's article,⁶⁵ we find that the transverse bar at the base of the cross indicates the ground on which the cross of Christ was erected; the apostles, the Roman soldiers, etc, are standing on it. As in the case of the Medal, it is wider than the arms of the cross. Leclercq does not give a single piece of evidence to support the thesis that the transverse bar is the letter "I." Nor do works which we have consulted back it up.⁶⁶ We are not, therefore, dealing with a documented hypothesis.

In a conversation with S. Kobielius, professor of Christian Iconography (UKSW, Warsaw), I understood that the search for a

⁶² See ZANGARI, *Simbologia*, pp. 58-85; W. BOMBA, *Cudowny Medalik jako znak i jego sens teologiczny* [*The Miraculous Medal as a Sign and its Theological Meaning*], in: B. BEJZE (compiler), *W nurcie zagadnień posoborowych* [*With Regard to Post-Conciliar Questions*], vol. 15: *Kontemplacja i działanie* [*Contemplation and Activity*], Warszawa 1983, pp. 337-338.

⁶³ FEUILLET, *La doctrina Mariana*, in: *Las apariciones*, p. 208; CID, *Medalla Milagrosa*, in: *Las apariciones*, p. 170.

⁶⁴ See S. Kobielius: *Krzyż Chrystusa. Od znaku i figury do symbolu i metafory* [*The cross of Christ; from sign and figure to symbol and metaphor*], Warszawa 2000.

⁶⁵ *Croix et crucifix*, by the same author in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. III/3, Paris 1907, pp. 3045-3131.

⁶⁶ V. Grossi, the article *Croix, crucifix*, in A. DI BERARDINO - F. VIAL (eds.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien*, vol. 1, Paris 1990, pp. 592-594; Y. CHRISTIE, *Croce*, in: L. CASTE - I. FRANCHI - M.A. CRIPPA, *Iconografia e arte cristiana*, vol. 1, Milano 2004, pp. 548-553.

link, in this case, with the tradition of primitive Christianity, was a mistake, and that to see the letter “I” in the horizontal bar was totally without foundation. There is nothing unusual in that type of cross.⁶⁷ It is merely a free composition which must be interpreted in the overall context of the apparition. This opinion is in line with the account of Catherine herself, who did not take the bar to be the letter “I,” but, according to Quentin’s account, took it in a very general way, as being just a bar.⁶⁸ It was in the same way, towards the end of the 19th century, that Chevalier, Catherine’s confidant, understood it.⁶⁹

When we look at Feuillet and Cid’s suggestion, that the meaning is the union of Mother and Son, it seems strange that the back of the Medal emphasises the same thing twice: the second example is the image of the hearts (point 2.2.). Given that there is a theological side to this proposition, this study will give a later response.

b) Proposition of Interpretation

The two opinions presented above, which see in the cross the symbol of Christ, show an important weak element, namely that the revelation shows the M and not the cross. The cross remains in its shadow. After the apparition of the Medal, when Catherine wonders whether, as in the case of the front, there should also be an inscription on the back, around the two central symbols, she heard simply that “the M and the two Hearts say enough.”⁷⁰ (We will return to this in 2.3.a.). Applying an intellectual short-cut, the choice falls on the letter M, because it is the more important; the cross is passed over in silence (a secondary theme), which is difficult to explain, seeing that it must indicate Christ.

The two other pieces of evidence which we are going to present confirm not only the lesser symbolic importance of the cross with respect to the M, but lead us to the correct interpretation of the theme of the cross on the bar. Fr Aladel, referring to Sister Catherine’s account of the medal, states clearly that the cross was small, smaller than the letter M: “[...] the letter M surmounted by a

⁶⁷ In connection with this, see his study, already referred to, *Krzyż Chrystusa [The Cross of Christ]*.

⁶⁸ The account of the interrogation of Frs Aladel and Étienne, in DChD 1, No. 368 (p. 264). The French word “barre” also means a rail, or a stick or rod., which in this context would indicate a thick line (as it is most commonly understood). In our opinion it is more a question of a different meaning of “barre,” namely a mark (made by the pen), a line.

⁶⁹ The cross “[...] underlined with a bar”: “deposition on 17 June 1896 (PO, sess. 10), in DChD 1, No. 878 (p. 200).

⁷⁰ DChD 1, No. 456 (p. 296).

small cross.”⁷¹ That is the same way in which the cross, on the globe of the earth held by Mary in her hands, was described by Catherine: “[...] the globe surmounted by a small cross.”⁷² In this second instance she had no doubt whatever that there was question of the whole of redeemed humanity; she understood this to be the explanation.⁷³ The cross being smaller than the letter M is contrary to the position of Christ in the work of redemption, and the resemblance to the description of the cross in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, lead us to the conclusion that what we are dealing with is the image of redeemed humanity. Furthermore, we can see here an analogy with Christian iconography. There the horizontal line at the base of the cross (wider than the arms) indicates the earth.

We believe that in the symbol in question on the back, the horizontal bar indicates the globe of the earth, over which rises the cross of Christ (Checking with Kobiellus will show that he considers this interpretation to be the natural one for the symbol). From the origin of Christianity the cross is the sign of salvation. In our opinion it symbolises on the back, with the horizontal bar indicating the globe of the earth, the whole of humanity redeemed by Christ⁷⁴ (just like the globe surmounted by a small cross held by Mary in her hands).

Taking the cross on the back of the Medal as a symbol of Christ, as we have done, raises certain doubts about over-emphasising the role of Mary. That is why, right from the beginning, the cross shown on the Medal had the same dimensions as the letter M.⁷⁵ Moreover, the cross on the horizontal bar is interlaced with the letter M as if embraced: if the cross had symbolised Christ it would have sprung directly from the letter M, or even would have been placed on the same level. We see this type of representation in certain illustrations of the Medal (allusion to Mary at the foot of the cross). We regard

⁷¹ “Notice historique” dated 20 August 1834, in DCh 1, No. 52 (p. 219).

⁷² Handwritten note dated 10 April 1876, in DChD 1, No. 635 (p. 351).

⁷³ Handwritten accounts from 1841, in DChD 1, Nos. 455-456 (pp. 293-294).

⁷⁴ The symbol of the cross on the back includes the person of Christ in the sense that he is the author of redemption.

⁷⁵ See in: LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, pp. 61 & 63; ZEDDE - ZANGARI, *Medaglia*, part 2: *Iter storico numismatico*, pp. 66-149; Zangari (*Simbologia*, pp. 26 and 5 3ff.) suggests a rather obscure hypothesis that the cross, at the start, was not interlaced with the monogram of Mary (above the letter M), and that is why, because of lack of space on the back, it had to be small (Greek cross). It seems that Zangari understands by “small cross” the Greek cross in order to be able to see, by making a link with the iconography of early Christianity, the monogram of the name of Jesus in the horizontal bar (see above).

these, and similar modifications, as evidence of an inappropriate understanding of the symbolism of the cross on the bar in the context of the letter M. The horizontal bar plays an absolutely fundamental role in the overall context of the symbol: its purpose is to point to a correct understanding.

There is no doubt that the letter M indicates Mary in the disputed theme of the back. We do not however agree that, in the case of the cross on the bar, there is question of the letters I (horizontal bar) and X (cross), monograms of Jesus Christ. Nor is there, either, a question of the union of Mary and her Son in the work of redemption (horizontal bar linking M to the cross). It is the vision of the Virgin with the Globe considered above, which clarifies the matter of the horizontal bar and the entire symbolism of which it is a part. We consider as fundamental the accounts, referred to above, which speak of the small cross rising above the globe of the earth held by Mary and above the letter M. In the disputed symbol, therefore, we see Mary (letter M) presenting redeemed humanity (cross on bar) to the Lord, as that took place in the vision of the Virgin holding the globe in her hands.

We believe that *the letter M with the cross on the bar is really a symbolic way of representing the Mary of the vision of the globe, in which she is holding the redeemed world in her hands and presenting it to the Lord.* The suggested interpretation is deduced from the apparition itself and responds to the Blessed Virgin's ardent wish, expressed through this apparition, that she be honoured as the one who presents the world to the Lord (see **Historic conclusions b**, note 117). We will be able to explain in detail, in the later part of our study (point 5), the significance of this offering of the golden globe in the disputed symbolism of the back.

2.2. The Theme of the Wounded Hearts of Jesus and Mary

The theme of the two wounded hearts of Jesus and Mary fits in well with the symbolism already dealt with. Mary's heart transfixed by a sword, placed beside her Son's heart crowned with thorns, recalls her sharing in his redemptive work (within the limits of the mission God set out for her). This agrees perfectly with Simeon's prophecy (Lk 2:35),⁷⁶ and also with the testimony of Jn (19:25-27),⁷⁷

⁷⁶ For example, I.H. MARSHALL, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Grand Rapids (MI) 1978, pp. 122-123; C.F. EVANS, *Saint Luke*, London-Philadelphia 1993, pp. 219-220.

⁷⁷ For example R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, AB 29A, New York 1970, pp. 922-927; I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Gesù verità. Studi di cristologia*

Jesus speaking from the cross: Mary has her share of the sacrifice connected with our sins, because she is mother of the Redeemer. The linked suffering of Mother and Son reaches its culmination on Calvary; the representation of the two wounded hearts refers primarily to that moment.⁷⁸

The union between Mother and her Son at the key moment of the redemption of the human race is expressed by the linkage of the two hearts, one beside the other, on the same level. The relationship of motherhood with respect to the Son of God, in which the Son recognises the priority of the Mother, in accordance with the order of human maternity (cf. Lk 2:51), is the only reason for locating them on the same level. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* sees Mary's motherhood as her "supreme dignity" which makes her "the beloved daughter of the Father" (§ 53). We understand this locating of the two hearts on the same line as an extraordinary degree of unity with her Son "by a close and indissoluble tie" (*ibid*) which arises from Mary's divine maternity and forms the basis of her role and her rank in the work of redemption.

In this image of the two wounded hearts we draw close to the truth of the perfect union between the Mother of God and the Redeemer. The theme of her union with the Son is based on her divine maternity and is already present in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, in the image of the white half-globe, and it is from that that it may be deduced.

a) The Theological Message of the Themes Treated Already

The perfect union of the Mother and the Son of God (the image of the two hearts) forms the reason for the link, and Mary's mission towards the human race (the letter M with the cross on the bar). We have already mentioned that the cross on the horizontal bar does not rest directly on the letter M, but that it interlaces with it as if it were a folding of arms. In the work of salvation the mother of Jesus plays a protective role with regard to the human race. This is the way

giovannea, Torino 1973, pp. 158-164; by the same author: *Marie dans le mystère de l'alliance*, Paris 1988, pp. 240-257. X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean*, part. 4, Paris 1990, pp. 134-148; Y. SMOENS, *Selon Jean. 1. Une traduction, 2. Une interprétation*, Bruxelles 1997, and other authors, especially Catholic ones.

⁷⁸ According to Lk 2:35 Mary's suffering is linked not only to her Son's destiny but also to that of the Jewish nation, to its hostile attitude towards Jesus. That is why her suffering begins at the moment her Son's mission begins and continues after his death (cf. W. RAKOCY, *Święty Łukasz wobec niewiary Izraela – krytyka i nadzieja* [*St Luke Confronts Israel's Unbelief – Criticism and Hope*], RSB 24, Warszawa 2006, pp. 22-23).

that Sister Catherine understood the gesture of holding the globe of the earth in her hands: Mary offers all human beings to the Lord. The truth about Mary's protection of Christ's redeemed children is portrayed on the back by a symbolic presentation of this gesture in the letter M and the cross on the bar. We cannot understand this concern for the human race other than in the context of her perfect relationship with her Son; she completely enveloped in her care the Author of redemption, and now, with the same care, the children redeemed by him.

Mary's divine maternity forms the basis of her relationship with her Son in the image of the hearts (even up to her sharing in his sacrifice). Her link with the children of her Son, which we have classified also as maternal, arises from this relationship. Her spiritual maternity extends over every redeemed person, whom she receives as her sons and daughters at the moment when Christ, on the cross, entrusted John to her (Jn 19:25-27).⁷⁹ The two images, of the hearts arranged one beside the other, and the letter M interlaced with the cross on the bar, namely the unity of Mother and Son and then of the Redeemer's mother and redeemed humanity, allow us to understand why the work of the Son of God is entrusted to her care by such an expressive gesture, in which she holds redeemed humanity in her hands: the maternal link between Mary and Christ forms the reason for her link with humanity. This is shown in a striking way by placing the two hearts as the support, the base, for the symbol of the letter M with the cross.

Mary, on the back of the Miraculous Medal, is really the Mother of the Redeemer, who by her childbearing and her mission towards the human race, becomes the spiritual mother of the redeemed. In the presentation of the maternal link of the mother with her Son, and by extension with humanity, the idea of mediation is conveyed: Mary, while remaining in perfect union with the Son of God, offers to Him everything concerning the human race (the link: humanity-Son of God). Her motherly mediation towards the redeemed will be completed on the front.

2.3. The Symbolism of the Twelve Stars

All that remains to be explained with regard to the back of the Medal is the symbolism of the twelve stars. It is generally believed that the twelve stars are a symbol of the Church, which is linked to the twelve Apostles, namely the renewed people of the old covenant,

⁷⁹ See note 77.

who comprised twelve tribes.⁸⁰ An understanding of this theme, and its role in the Medal's message, demands that we first go back to the unfolding of the vision of 27 November 1830.

a) *The Historical Context*

In one of her accounts written in 1841 Sister Catherine wrote that after the apparition of the Medal she wondered if there should not be an inscription around the two central symbols on the back, as there was on the front. An interior voice told her that "the M (with the cross) and the two hearts say enough."⁸¹ This fact is confirmed three times by Fr Aladel in his accounts, drawn up seven years earlier (1834).⁸² Catherine's words suggest that she did not see, on the back, anything other than the two central themes, and, therefore, did not see the twelve stars. Chevalier⁸³ expresses moral certitude that the stars were there during the apparition, and that Catherine passed on this fact to Aladel. This seems hardly likely. The "question" addressed to Heaven, about a possible later invocation around the hearts and the monogram of Mary with the cross, presumes that there was a vacant space! We consider that to be sufficient proof. The theme of the twelve stars on the back is not present in any of the sources which tell of the unfolding of the apparition. Catherine surely obeyed the voice which she heard.

We go back now to Aladel. When, in 1832, he decided to have the Medal minted, he based himself on the information which he had already heard from Catherine (because of the reservations he had on this matter); the only thing he was going to ask Catherine was about a possible inscription on the back.⁸⁴ She did not say anything to him about the stars on the back of the Medal, because there were not any; what is more, he understood from her that the two hearts and Mary's monogram with the cross were sufficient. That is the reason why he, too, does not seem to have been responsible for having put the theme of the twelve stars there. It is not just that Aladel never speaks about this anywhere, but furthermore, in 1848, he had a medal, without the stars, minted for the Children of Mary.⁸⁵ This being so, it was the person who prepared the model for the medal who most

⁸⁰ See the authors mentioned in note 61.

⁸¹ DChD 1, No. 456 (p. 296).

⁸² DChD 1, No. 17 (p. 202), No. 38 (p. 213), No. 52 (p. 221).

⁸³ *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 76.

⁸⁴ See the statements of witnesses on this subject in LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique*, vol. 2: *Preuves*, p. 223, note 16.

⁸⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 199. See also different traditions about the number of twelve for the stars (from 9 even up to 32), in ZANGARI, *Simbologia*, pp. 218-231.

probably placed the stars on the front, around Mary's head (because of Rv 12:1).

We know that Vachette, the silversmith and medallist, who produced the first model of the medal, introduced certain minor elements on the back, for example two horizontal lines which separated the hearts from the monogram of Mary with the cross;⁸⁶ also, on the front he put an almost invisible veil on Mary, and arranged the invocation in his own way. He is the only person who could have introduced the theme of the twelve stars:⁸⁷ He probably transferred them from the front (the stars around Mary's head), because they are not present on the first medals he produced.⁸⁸ As he was a professional he had regard for the aesthetic element, the horizontal lines or the arrangement of the invocation, for example, but he brought a theological context for the message of the Medal. Aladel allowed him a certain amount of freedom in this matter; he concentrated on the content, which he regarded as being the most important.

b) The Theological Aspect

The symbolism of stars in the Bible is quite multiple and nuanced.⁸⁹ For twelve stars we have only Rv 12:1. The interpretation that the stars symbolise the Church, proposed by certain authors, calls for precision on our part.

In Nb 24:17 there is a foretelling of the appearance of a star rising from Jacob, namely of the Messiah; this interpretation is supported by several Jewish authorities.⁹⁰ In the NT, the star of Bethlehem (Mt 2:2) refers back to this foretelling, in which is also seen the fulfilment of the promise that the Messiah will be the sun of justice (Ml 3:20; see Lk 1:78), and the morning star (Rv 2:28, 22:16; 2 P 1:19). The brightness shining from him will darken all other lights in heaven and they will even become useless, because the Lamb will be the only light (Rv 21:23): "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). Bringing this evidence together we draw close to what

⁸⁶ They can still be seen today in certain illustrations of the back of the Medal.

⁸⁷ A similar opinion is expressed by ZANGARI, *Simbologia*, pp. 26 and 211 ff., and LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique*, vol. 2: *Preuves*, pp. 199 and 226-227, note 25.

⁸⁸ An aureole around Mary's head is present, in the form of a thin line (see LAURENTIN, *op. cit.*, vol. 1: *Récit*, pp. 106 and 113; ZEDDE - ZANGARI, *Medaglia*, part. 2, *Iter storico numismatico*, pp. 66-68).

⁸⁹ See, for example, Gn 15:5, 37:9; Nb 24:17; Ob 4; Jb 22:12.

⁹⁰ See H. STRACK - P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 1, München 1922, pp. 76-77.

is generally accepted, namely that the symbolism of the star (and, by extension, of light) with respect to the Messiah is well rooted in biblical tradition.

It is difficult to connect this symbolism to the Church. It is only in Rv 1:20 that seven stars represent the seven angels of the Church, namely the bishops; the individual churches are symbolised by the lampstands. Other images appear, such as the wall, the gates and the precious stones (Rv 21),⁹¹ always with the number twelve. The Woman in Rv 21, who represents the New Jerusalem, in other words the Church, is enclosed by the wall with twelve foundation stones (with the names of the twelve apostles on them) and twelve gates (with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them). The foundation stones under the wall are decorated with twelve precious stones. There is one stable element in the changing image, namely the number twelve. The theme conveyed by twelve goes back to the twelve tribes of Israel and then the twelve apostles, representing the new people of God. The analogy with the Church comes from the number twelve and not from the star theme.

A linking of the number twelve with the star theme, unique to Rv 12, in the form of a wreath, adds an element of glorification to the symbol of twelve.⁹² The meaning of the twelve stars on the back of the Medal differs, however, from that of Rv 12. We think that in the twelve stars on the back a blending of the divine and human elements has taken place: *Christ, as the light of the world in the image of the star, and the Church as the People of God in the image of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles*. The twelve stars are certainly Christ and his members, his people. The symbolism of blending the star theme with the number twelve emphasises the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church. The star theme is the basis of the image, not the number twelve, and that is why the twelve stars, first of all indicate Christ. We must, therefore, see the crown of stars on the back of the Medal as one single great light which enlightens all humanity, and being Christ, shines in his members.

The twelve stars represent, above all, Christ as the Lamb of God. It was through his redemptive death that the Church was born (Jn 19:25-27; compare 1:35-36), and then the Lamb of God remains the sole light for her (Rv 21:23). In this context the title "Lamb of God" best corresponds to Christ's role in the work of redemption and

⁹¹ Cf. Eph 2:20-22.

⁹² It is at the same time an announcement of the definitive victory of the Church; see P. FARKAŠ, *La "Donna" di Apolisse 12. Storia, bilancio, nuove prospettive*, Tesi Gregoriana – Serie Teologia 25, Roma 1997, pp. 205-229.

definitive salvation. In the image of the twelve stars we see, first of all, him who was pointed out by John the Baptist with the words ECCE AGNUS DEI, and who later triumphs with his Church in the final chapters of Revelation as LUX MUNDI. The twelve stars represent a mystical union of the Lamb of God and redeemed humanity resplendent in his light. On the back of the Medal the central role in the work of redemption and the salvation of humanity is attributed to Christ.

Unlike Mary's monogram, with the cross and the two wounded hearts, the theme of the twelve stars has no equivalent in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe. And even if the crown of stars around Mary's head was probably present in that vision,⁹³ it does not correspond to the theological message of the twelve stars on the back of the Medal. The theme of the stars on the back, for the reasons that it represents the mystery of Christ (and the Church), can have an equivalent only in Him who is there behind the Blessed Virgin's mission. Christ in the image of the twelve stars is the light of the world. Although the appearance of a crown around Mary's head suggests that she goes forth in the Lord's name, her position, unique to herself, is not equal to that of Christ, who dominates the back. Neither must we look for the theme of the twelve stars in the rays of light springing from Mary's hands in the vision in which she is holding the globe, because they already have their equivalent in the same form on the front. The absence of an equivalent of this theme in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe becomes evident, given the fact that it was not there during the apparition of the Medal (being introduced by Vachette, the medalist).

2.4. The Theological Message of the Back (Continued)

Mary's role in the work of redemption, indicated in the foregoing conclusions, now appears more clearly. Because of the mystical union of the Lamb of God and the Church (the stars symbol), the central section of the back of the Medal brings out two truths: 1) the union of Mother and Son (the image of the hearts) and, given this, 2) the link and the mission of the mother of the redeemed with respect to the people of God, entrusted to her protection (the letter M interlaced with the cross). The back of the Medal stresses at the same time that Mary belongs to the Church, being redeemed by Christ,⁹⁴

⁹³ See **Historical Conclusions e.**

⁹⁴ In the sense of her protection against contracting faults (see *Lumen gentium*, § 53).

as well as the relationship between the Son of God and the redeemed world, and her privileged, and even exceptional, position.⁹⁵ We characterise this position as a perfect union with the Son of God from which resulted in the mediation between humanity and the Lord (a link symbolised by her holding redeemed humanity in her hands). Because on the back of the Medal she is shown, *par excellence*, as Mother (in relation to her Son and humanity), we characterise her position with regard to the redeemed as a maternal relationship with Christ's Church. She is shown in this role by a symbolic motherly gesture, offering humanity to the Lord.

The whole image of the back of the Medal is a representation of the Mystical Body of Christ: the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church, and it is against that background that we emphasise the privileged position and mission of the Mother of the Redeemer, our mother.

3. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FRONT OF THE MEDAL

The commentators on the symbolism of the front⁹⁶ draw attention to the invocation around the image of the Blessed Virgin, indicating her conception without sin, then to the crushing of the serpent's head, which announces the definitive victory over Satan, and also to the distribution of graces in the rays springing from her hands. The front of the Medal should include the glorious aspect.

The representation of Mary on the front goes back to the biblical tradition (Gn 3, Rv 12) and refers to the themes which are found there. John's vision seems closer to her representation on the front than does the text of the Protoevangelium; however, the front is not an exacreflection. The theme of Mary' sharing in the victory over Satan was taken from the Protoevangelium (the crushing of the serpent's head). The two texts are the basis of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe. The content of the front, like the vision known as "with the Globe," is linked to the biblical tradition, and it is only in that light that we can rightly understand its message.

⁹⁵ *Idem.*

⁹⁶ ZANGARI, *Simbologia*; CID, *Medalla Milagrosa*, in: *Las Apariciones*, pp. 177-189; FEUILLET, *La doctrian Mariana*, in: *Las Apariciones*, pp. 208-209; DE DIOS, *Milagrosa (Virgen de la Medalla)*, in: PÉREZ FLORES - MARTÍNEZ - ORCAJO - LÓPEZ (eds.), *Diccionario de espiritualidad vicenciana*, especially pp. 373-374; ZEDDE, *Medaglia Miracolosa*; compare also CRAPEZ, *Message*, pp. 41-50.

3.1. The Theme of the Crushing of the Serpent's Head

The text of the Protoevangelium (Gn 3:15) foretells victory over the powers of evil, namely over Satan: the woman will play her part in the eschatological victory of her posterity (the Saviour) through the fact of her having brought him into the world. If Eve, conquered by Satan, represents a specific woman, then the one who will play her part in bringing victory over the serpent should also be a person who really exists.⁹⁷ In the Woman of Gn 3:15 we can see the New Eve, that is to say, the Mother of the Redeemer. Mary gives birth to the Saviour, who, being her "Posterity," will crush the serpent's head. The word "posterity" is not confined just to the Redeemer, but includes all her children, including Mary,⁹⁸ who bring about the victory over Satan. Mary appears in this combat as the strongest refuge among human beings, totally united to the Son of God and collaborating with him (the image of the two hearts on the back). In the person of the Mother of Jesus, humanity already appears stronger in the real world than Satan's efforts.

What we have just said is not explicitly formulated in the extant accounts of the apparition (Catherine, Aladel). Once we have accepted the interpretation of the white half-globe under Mary's feet, it does not seem that the theme of the serpent was there before its disappearance in the rays of light and the appearance of the earthly globe (see **Historical conclusions c** and **e**). We can deduce indirectly the theme of the serpent from the message of the white half-globe, the symbol of Mary's Immaculate Conception and her perfect union with the Son of God. The Blessed Virgin, the unique person of the entire human race free from the efforts of the Evil One, from all taint of sin and the slightest moral imperfection, brings about the decisive victory over him, towards whom all others turn, following the path of being freed from sins.⁹⁹ Mary's victory over Satan, namely her perfection never being touched by sin, foretells the ultimate renewed perfection of the redeemed. The representation of the Blessed Virgin in the vision in which she holds the globe and that on the front of the Medal is a consequence of the definitive victory over Satan; her personal victory is the effect of her sinless conception (the invocation); her sharing in the victory of the remainder of the redeemed is the distribution of the graces merited by her Son. With this point we are ready to pass on to the next theme of the front of the Medal.

⁹⁷ FEUILLET, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁹⁸ By virtue of the grace of her sinless conception which was attributed to her in advance (compare *Lumen gentium*, § 53).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

3.2. The Theme of the Distribution of Divine Graces

We see, in the representation of the Blessed Virgin on the front of the Medal, striking references which go back to Rv 12:1. Christian tradition was inspired by this image in presenting her Immaculate Conception. However, the distribution of graces which concerns us is not present in Rv 12, and constitutes a new Marian tradition in the Church. Moreover, a predominant opinion among biblical exegetes is that the Woman of Rv 12 is first of all a representation of the People of God of the Old Testament, and secondly of the New, that is of the Church (the ecclesial interpretation).¹⁰⁰ We will first take a closer look at the text from Revelation, and then return to the vision of the Virgin with the Globe.

The vision in Rv 12 mingles the collective and individual elements, that is, those which refer to the people of God and those which directly indicate Mary.¹⁰¹ In certain passages of chapter 12 references to the Woman do not match the Church, or are relevant to her alone. The Woman who is spoken about in verses 4.b.-5. is a definite person, Mary about to give birth to the Messiah; an allusion, in verse 13, may also link the two themes, Mary and the Church. In the Semitic world the passage from the individual to the collective, and vice-versa, is a well-known phenomenon.

In Rv 12 the interpenetration of the image of The Woman-Mary and the image of The Woman-Church lets us see the entire vision as an integral unity of the Mother of God and the Church,¹⁰² and more precisely of the mother of the redeemed with the Church of her Son, entrusted to her care. That is why Rv 12 shows the struggle of the children of Christ and Mary with the powers of evil, before they achieve the definitive victory over them: Mary shares in all the adversities which afflict the Church. The message of Rv 12 allows us to draw an important conclusion from it about the mission of the Blessed Virgin on the front of the Medal: in sharing in all the adversities which afflict the Church Mary is totally united with it, following the example of her perfect union with her Son (the image of the hearts).

In the temporal struggles of this world against adversities, Mary supports the human race, entrusted to her protection, by dispensing to it the graces merited by her Son (the image of the rays on the front of the Medal). The mission of distributing divine graces is closely

¹⁰⁰ See FARKAŠ, *La "Donna" di Apocalisse 12*.

¹⁰¹ See DE LA POTTERIE, *Marie*, pp. 261-283.

¹⁰² Within the framework of the union of Christ and the Church (the symbolism of the twelve stars on the back).

linked to the theme of victory over evil, for this victory, which consists in perseverance with God, or not falling into the wiles of Satan, is brought about by God's grace. The effect of the graces sought, in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe (the brightly shining light), is represented on the front by the victory over Satan. The front of the Medal draws together the theme of the dispensing of graces and that of victory over evil by the graphic positioning of the twin themes: the serpent on the earth's surface and the rays which spread down to earth. The Blessed Virgin, with the globe of the earth under her feet, appears in the role of Queen of the World.

The mission of distributing the graces sought through the Blessed Virgin, leading to victory over Satan, is the central theme of the front of the Medal. Because of the fact that she never gave in to the seducer, having collaborated in a perfect way with divine grace, she becomes, by God's will, the distributrix of these graces by reason of the Son-humanity relationship. The theme of the distribution of the divine graces is explicitly present in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe: Catherine states very clearly that the rays shining from Mary's hands are definitely the graces sought from the Blessed Virgin.¹⁰³ Her Immaculate Conception is the reason why things are as they are on the front, which, in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, expresses the theme of innocence in the symbol of the white half-globe.

The distribution of the graces sought from her Son introduces another link with Mary's mission represented on the Medal, the inverse of what is on the back, namely a mediation between the Lord and the human race. Given that the gesture by which Mary offers humanity to the Lord is on the back (the letter M with the cross on the bar), the distribution of the divine graces is present on the front. Both aspects of Mary's mission, present in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, form the entirety of the Medal (and constitute a development of the message of this vision).

The two aspects of Mary's mission, in the vision in which she is holding the globe, constitute the heart of the apparition of 27 November 1830, and are found on the two faces of the Medal: 1) The Immaculate Virgin's mission, in the Lord's name, towards the human race (front), and 2) the mission of the Mother of God, in the name of the human race, towards the Lord (back). Mary's mission on the Miraculous Medal has a twofold approach to mediation between the Lord and humanity.

¹⁰³ The accounts and handwritten notes from 1841 and 1876, in DChD 1, Nos. 455-456 (pp. 294-295), No. 632 (p. 345), and Nos. 635-636 (pp. 351-352).

3.3. A Summary of the Historico-Theological Aspects

The messages on the front and back of the Medal are not equal in importance. The theme of the twelve stars, that is of the symbol of Christ and the Church, embraces the whole message of the front, namely the dispensing of graces by the Immaculate Virgin and victory over Satan. It is in the nature of things that the importance of the message on the back outstrips that on the front: Mary's mission is part of the mystery of Christ and the Church. With regard to the Blessed Virgin's personal mission, it seems that what is on the back also outstrips the front: the graces sought lead to victory over Satan and to her offering of humanity to the Lord; moreover, the subject of her sinless conception is a foundation of her perfect union with her Son by reason of her divine motherhood. That is why the image on the front should be considered in the context of the back, and not the other way round.

The victory over Satan, prince of this world, achieved thanks to her Immaculate Conception, gives Mary the right to hold the title of Queen of the World. That is how Catherine understood the representation of the Blessed Virgin in the vision in which she is holding the globe, and it is mainly this role which she shows on the front of the Medal. The back shows her maternal relationship to the Son of God and humanity. Because we can, from the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, deduce the messages of both the front and back (apart from the twelve stars), Mary appears to us in the vision known as "with the Globe" not merely as Queen of the World but also as Mother of Christ and of all the redeemed. With regard to Mary-Mother on the back, the theme of the twelve stars makes clear her motherly relationship with humanity in the context of the mystery of the Church and Christ, and leads to the conclusion that she is Mother for the Church (point 5.). We do not want to make artificial divisions, but Mary of the vision in which she holds the globe is represented on the front of the Medal above all as Queen,¹⁰⁴ on the back as Mother.¹⁰⁵ Given that the importance of the message on the back is greater than on the front, she has, above all, the role of Mother in the way in which the Miraculous Medal is constructed.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Because of her sinless conception there took place a perfect collaboration with divine grace and, as a result, the victory over Satan (the theme of innocence in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe).

¹⁰⁵ Because of her divine maternity there took place a perfect maternal relationship with her Son, Redeemer of humanity, and then a similar relationship towards the redeemed (the theme of union).

¹⁰⁶ Zedde (Medaglia Miracolosa) gives the same opinion, although as a result of a different logical process.

The apparition of the Miraculous Medal on 27 November 1830 is a shift from the truth about Mary, Queen and Mother (the vision called “with the Globe”), to the plane of cult (the medal), that is, of the everyday life of the People of God. The unfolding of the apparition becomes logical: *What Sister Labouré had seen (the vision of the Virgin with the Globe) was contained in the message of the two sides of the Medal,¹⁰⁷ and was given to be believed.* The conclusion presented, which is the fruit of theological analyses, bears witness to an historical coherence in the representation of Mary on the front of the Medal (independently of the position of the invisible hands: see point 1.2.b.) with the vision seen by Sister Catherine.

The state of “dependence” of the front and back (of the Medal) on the vision of the Virgin with the Globe changed at the moment when Vachette introduced the theme of the twelve stars. The back, which presents the mystery of Christ and his Church, now constitutes (in the sense of the importance of the message) the apogee of the apparition of 27 November 1830: it includes not only the message of the front but also the entire vision of Mary holding the globe. This vision became subordinate to the content of the back of the same Medal. The theme of the twelve stars deepened the theological message of the Medal but, at the same time, shattered the relationship between the vision of the Virgin with the Globe and the two sides of the Medal.¹⁰⁸

At this point we must certainly pay attention to the successive steps, during which the process of the formation of the Medal was enabled to be finalised. If Catherine’s wish had been carried out, the back would have repeated in a symbolic way everything that she wanted on the front (Marty holding in her hands the globe of the earth and enveloping it with graces), that is, the twofold aspect of her mission. Aladel’s interpretation caused the twofold aspect of Mary’s mission, in the vision in which she holds the globe in her hands, to be split, and is present on each of the faces of the Medal; (Front: distribution of the graces. Back: the gesture of offering humanity to the Lord). The medalist’s definitive support for the twelve stars on the back shifted the emphasis from the vision of the Virgin with the Globe to the back of the Medal. If the Medal had been made according to Catherine’s wish she probably would not have

¹⁰⁷ With the support of secondary persons such as Aladel.

¹⁰⁸ We are not going into the task of explaining historically the way matters are at present, namely why the stars were not immediately on the back, or the reason for their being there. Neither must we link this question to Aladel’s contribution to the form of the Medal, because that did not upset the sense of the apparition (point 1.2.b.).

demanded the statue of the Immaculate holding the globe in her hands. Then, in the context of what is actually on the back, the existence of the statue is significant only in the sense of Marian devotion, and not in the sense of the theological message (the content of the back and of the entire Medal surpass it).

4. HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are partly the result of applied analyses and partly the fruit of reading the source texts.

a) If the message of the Miraculous Medal is a transformation of the content of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, namely of Mary's mission with its twofold aspect, a conclusion of a historical nature is demanded, things being that way. Sister Catherine, who upheld that what the vision of the Virgin with the Globe was should have been on the front of the Medal, did not realise that her message is contained on the two sides of the Medal (front: distribution of the graces; back: the gesture of offering the human race to the Lord). Is that startling? No. What is described above seems acceptable, taking into account the uncertainty of Catherine in questions about the apparition (especially what took place with regard to the hand-held globe);¹⁰⁹ this is confirmed by her interpretation of the vision up to the moment of the apparition of the back (point 1.1b). Furthermore, the history of apparitions teaches us that the person who experiences an apparition does not necessarily have to be its interpreter.

Catherine's determination to get the vision of the Virgin with the Globe portrayed, in spite of Aladel's opposition (conclusion **g**), served an end determined by God's providence. The vision remained completely unknown, because the confessor wanted it that way. Sister Dufès was flabbergasted by this information when Catherine, in the final year of her life, confided in her.¹¹⁰ If, once the medal had been minted, Catherine had kept silent right up to the end (she broke silence with the Blessed Virgin's consent),¹¹¹ we would not have known today about the vision itself, and would be deprived of the key to understanding the symbol of the letter M with the cross, and, as a consequence, the key to complete understanding of the back, and of the Medal as a medal. We think, therefore, that ignorance of

¹⁰⁹ See the evidence of Sister Tanguy, dated 24 May 1897 (PO, sess. 24), in DChD 2, No. 906 (p. 229).

¹¹⁰ Evidence of Sister Tanguy in DChD 2, No. 906 (pp. 228-229).

¹¹¹ See the evidence of Sister Dufès dated 29 April 1896 (PO, sess. 3), in DChD 2, No. 870 (p. 180).

this vision right up to the year of Catherine's death brought about a greater appreciation, right from the beginning, of the cross on the back of the Medal.

b) Aladel was the most important interpreter of the revelation. In spite of his contribution to the message of the revelation of certain elements (see conclusions **f**, **g** and **i**), he kept the essential point of the revelation, namely the distribution of graces, which, at that time, was a new way of presenting the Immaculate Virgin. With regard to the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, Aladel was correct in not placing it on the front (point 1.2.b.). That is why he has the role of not just being its interpreter, but also, with Catherine, the intermediary of the content of the apparition. It seems that such a role for the confessor was foreseen by Heaven, contributed to by the fact that Catherine remained totally hidden with regard to the public.¹¹² Apart from that, according to the words of Sister de Geoffre,¹¹³ Mary had said to Catherine, when she complained of her confessor's reserve about the Medal which was about to be minted, that he was her servant and why "[...] a day will come when he will do what I want." We must also look at Aladel's contribution to the message of the revelation through the prism of the Blessed Virgin's words.

It is not just the interpretation of the apparition which is nearer to the truth which lies behind the confessor's decision, but also a justifiable precaution. In spite of the favourable acceptance of the Medal the Congregation of Rites itself refused, in 1837, permission for showing in churches images of the Immaculate Virgin based on the front (!), because it "differed considerably" (the image of the rays) from her traditional picture.¹¹⁴ Later on it forbade completely any showing of the statue of Mary holding the globe in her hands, sculpted in the year in which Catherine died, because of too elevated a role being attributed to the Virgin:¹¹⁵ previously, only Christ had been portrayed in this fashion. These are the same reasons, along with others, by which Aladel¹¹⁶ allowed himself to be guided and, given Sister de Geoffre's note already referred to, we can come to the

¹¹² According to Sister Dufès (1877 notes, in DChD 2, No. 645 [p. 54]) Catherine was going to ask the Blessed Virgin for permission to remain unknown.

¹¹³ Obituary notice, 1 January 1878, in DChD 2, No. 655 (p. 95).

¹¹⁴ DChD 1, No. 374 (pp. 273-276).

¹¹⁵ DChD 2, No. 701 (and the correspondence linked with this: Nos. 702-706); Nos. 718, 720 & 724 describe the future allowing of this statue for devotion, but with definite conditions.

¹¹⁶ See also LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique*, vol. 2: *Preuves*, pp. 188-189.

conclusion that Heaven accepted not just the actual form of the Medal but even, perhaps, was expecting such an outcome; Catherine's understanding of the vision and her determination (conclusion **a**) served to keep the vision of the Virgin with the Globe from being forgotten. If that is true, research should veer towards an explanation of the vision known as "with the Globe" with respect to the actual form of the Medal (which we have tried to do). Moreover, we do not exclude that it still has a role to play in the Church's life, namely in the sense of Marian devotion (see the summary of point 3.).¹¹⁷

The communitarian aspect of the Medal comes through in the development of its formation. It can be explained, though in a somewhat simplified manner, as follows: Catherine experienced the apparition, Aladel interpreted it, the medallist switched the twelve stars from the front to the back. The community of the Church shared in the acceptance and spread of the content of the apparition (the fruit of collaboration).

c) A matter which merits our attention is that Sister Catherine, in describing what was under Mary's feet in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, was not influenced by the painting in her native parish church, well known to her, which had links with Rv 12 and showed her with a half-moon under her feet.¹¹⁸ She often prayed in front of this picture over a ten-year period, and kept a clear recollection of it in her memory, for she had the vision of the Medal less than a year after her entry as a postulant (January 1830). She asserts, however, that she saw a white half-globe under Mary's feet; not being sure what this meant, she did not put her own interpretation on it and did not make a link with her own personal associations. In the next phase of the apparition she speaks, according to Chevalier's account, of the earth under her feet, which confirms that she was not influenced here either by the painting in her native parish. This witnesses to the absence of any piecing together in her way of reporting the facts; she tells things the way she saw them, telling only what she saw.¹¹⁹ This conclusion may cover every other aspect of the apparition.

¹¹⁷ What leads us to believe this is Sister Cosnard's evidence (PO, sess. 44, in DChD 2, No. 955); Sister Catherine, a month before her death (November 1876), told her very firmly that the Blessed Virgin wants "absolutely" to be praised as offering the world to the Lord because she "has prayed so much for the world" — this will be the source of many graces.

¹¹⁸ This painting is reproduced in LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique*, vol. 1: *Récit*, p. 33; also LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, p. 111.

¹¹⁹ This differs from Coste (*Mémoires*).

The openness with which she admitted that she no longer remembered something, together with her knowledge of the subject of the apparition, needed at a given moment, contribute to Catherine's credibility. When in 1835, five years after the apparition, L. Lecerf, at Aladel's request, was preparing a painting of the Blessed Virgin, he asked him about the colour of her veil. Her confessor could not recall the colour but he did not ask Catherine a direct question, just asking her to describe exactly Mary's appearance during this apparition. Catherine gave a written answer, saying she no longer recalled the details apart from one, the colour of her veil ("golden white"),¹²⁰ which is what Aladel was expecting. It can be seen, therefore, that it is by the will of Heaven that it was given to her to recognise, at any given moment, what was indispensable; her memory was selective but certain. Her lapses of memory were about details and were transitory. In later years she recalled exactly details about Mary's clothing during the same apparition (notes dated 1841 and 1876); she remembers in detail the vision of a Cross (1848), the vision of St Vincent's heart (1856), or the apparition of the 18th and 19th of July 1830 (1856). According to eye-witnesses some temporary lapses of memory were graces from the Blessed Virgin;¹²¹ they allowed Catherine to decline meetings with persons who asked, for example the archbishop of Paris or A. Ratisbonne, and to remain unknown.

There remains the matter of the statue of the Blessed Virgin, holding the globe in her hands, sculpted according to the instructions of Catherine herself, showing a serpent under Mary's feet. This proves its presence during the apparition on the one hand (see conclusion e), and on the other that the theme of the serpent does not fit in with the symbolism of the white half-globe, and it must, then, be placed on the globe of the earth which rose up in its stead (point 1). The presentation which we find again on the statue is the result of the application-association of the two images in Catherine's consciousness (point 1.2.b.). The consequence of this is that, at the same moment, there are two globes of the earth, in the hands and under the feet.¹²² That is the only reason why the Holy See

¹²⁰ See Sister Pineau's notes, dated 18 March 1877, in DChD 2, No. 646 (p. 57); also CHEVALIER, *Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 25.

¹²¹ Quentin's account from 1836, containing the evidence of Aladel and Étienne, in DChD 1, No. 368 (p. 265); also Chevalier's evidence on 22 June 1896 (PO, sess 11), in DChD 2, No. 879 (p. 201).

¹²² This conclusion is present in many instances in later accounts, as a result of having taken the white half-globe and the globe of the earth as being identical.

had reservations (conclusion **b**). The statue of Mary holding the globe should have been accompanied by the white half-globe under her feet, and not the globe of the earth with the serpent, having been part of the “median” phase (the front of the Medal).

d) Reading Sister Catherine’s account about the Miraculous Medal apparition can give rise to some astonishment, because she hardly connects herself with it. We learn more about it from the accounts of Fr Aladel, and from others to whom he had spoken of the apparition.¹²³ Catherine, in the accounts she wrote at the request of her confessor, centres on the vision of the Virgin with the Globe; she does not say anything about the form the front has at present, and she refers to the back in a superficial way. Nine years after the medal had been minted, when it was widely known, Catherine did not think it necessary to go back over the known facts (moreover, she was not convinced about what was on the front). Instead of doing this, she concentrated on the representation of Mary holding the globe in her hands, the vision which she still had not succeeded in having carried out.¹²⁴ We are paying less attention to what we have said in the second part of conclusion **c**.

e) In the accounts of Sister Catherine and Aladel there is never any question of stars around the Immaculate Virgin’s head. Catherine claimed to have seen her as being the Blessed Virgin, which could mean with the crown of stars. We know of only one piece of evidence which confirms this theme, namely Letaille’s sketch from 1841 (with the attached note),¹²⁵ allegedly based on Catherine’s indications (but see conclusion **i**). We are not overlooking that this theme was omitted from the notes based on his evidence, or, for the same reason, he did not attract the attention of, above all, Aladel. A deliberate omission of certain themes can be confirmed by Catherine’s confessor repeatedly stating that she saw the Blessed Virgin in the way that she was portrayed as the Immaculate Conception.¹²⁶

¹²³ Aladel’s letter and accounts are in the “Notice historique” of 1834 in DChD 1, No. 17 (pp. 199-202), No. 38 (pp. 208-213), No. 52 (pp. 217-222); the account of the evidence of Aladel and Étienne, established by Quentin, from December 1836, is in DChD 1, No. 368 (pp. 261-270).

¹²⁴ Compare LAURENTIN - ROCHE, Catherine Labouré, p. 85.

¹²⁵ DChD 1, Nos. 460-461.

¹²⁶ Aladel’s 1834 accounts are in DChD 1, No. 17 (pp. 199-200), No. 38 (pp. 209-210), No. 52 (pp. 218-219). There is question of it also in the 1836 account, established by Quentin, of the evidence of Aladel, and later of Aladel and Étienne, in DChD 1, No. 298 (pp. 235-236) and No. 368 (pp. 263-264).

Neither is there any question of the serpent in Catherine's and Aladel's accounts which are still extant.¹²⁷ This theme, in the same way, was taken as obvious, being known from the way in which Mary was portrayed as the Immaculate Conception. The applied study does not exclude it and even proves its existence (it is found on the statue of the Immaculate Conception, conclusion c). According to an oral account by Catherine's superior, to which Chevalier refers in his book, Catherine spoke to her clearly about the serpent in the context of the statue above.¹²⁸

The absence of the theme of the twelve stars on the back of the Medal will be dealt with in point 2.3.a.

f) In Aladel's accounts there is no mention of the earth under Mary's feet (front), which makes us wonder, because this theme diverges from pictures of her from that period, linking in with Rv 12:1. With regard to the effect of Aladel's passing over in silence the theme of the earth, we subscribe to the following explanation. We are not excluding that, following his own conviction, the motif of earth was opposed to the widespread image of the Immaculate Virgin, namely with the moon under her feet. Even if the Medal was minted, a barely visible half-globe under the feet of the Immaculate Virgin was not going to provoke questioning nor undermine the contemporary portrayal of her, in the way that a concise statement, published in the "Notice Historique," that the globe of the earth was there, would. That is why Catherine's confessor could deliberately pass over in silence any mention of the earth; he conceals it cleverly in a vague statement that Mary appeared as she was commonly portrayed as conceived without sin (at the same time, he did not say that there was the moon). This explanation becomes more likely in the light of his silences on the question of the Virgin with the Globe (the next conclusion).

g) It appears that there was a certain lack of precision in Aladel's transmission of what he heard from Catherine of the content of the apparition. Mention of showing France on the globe is often linked, in the popular account, to the globe under Mary's feet.¹²⁹ This is

¹²⁷ Chevalier (*Médaille Miraculeuse*) already adverted to this.

¹²⁸ *Idem*. She was going to say that it was "of a greenish colour, with yellow spots." Her message about the colour may be likely: in Jewish apocalyptic the colour green symbolises incurable, mortal illness, and is also present linked with the colour yellow (see for example 3 Hen 44:5; OracSib 1, 240).

¹²⁹ Also, for example, MISERMONT, *Les grâces extraordinaires*, pp. 111-112. When we speak of the theme of France, we are thinking of a representation of Catherine's own country, for example in the sense of its geographical shape and not its lettering. This is based on the verb "to represent," used by

suggested by the accounts of the questioning of Fathers Aladel and Étienne (not directly stated) when presenting their evidence with regard to the apparition;¹³⁰ (on the margin: we are dealing with an inconsistency on the confessor's part, as he passes over in silence the question of the globe of the earth under Mary's feet). When we go through Catherine's notes, something to the contrary emerges. We can even deduce, from an account from 1841, not very clear on this matter, that the theme of France was present on the globe held by Mary in her hands; the notes from Spring 1876 confirm it in an unequivocal way.¹³¹

It is Aladel who seems to be responsible for this divergence with regard to Catherine's accounts. He is on record as being reluctant about portraying the Virgin with the Globe; there is no reference to it in any of his accounts.¹³² In addition to this, Quentin's report, drawn up after the questioning of Catherine's confessor, makes no mention of this vision, which means that once again he passed over it in silence.¹³³ However, with the delegate of the archbishop of Paris he mentioned special graces for France, because that finds a place in the report.¹³⁴ Being a Frenchman, mention of France seemed interesting, to the extent that he did not wish to exclude it. As a result, it is in the report drawn up in the context of the vision of the front. That is the origin of the divergence, and of the reproduction of a fault; given the fact of the passing over in silence of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, mention of graces for France had, perforce, to be associated with the front of the Medal, where the globe was located under Mary's feet.

We accept that the theme of France was present on the globe which Mary held in her hands.¹³⁵ Sister Tanguy's evidence is also

Catherine, which means "to show," "to exhibit," "to evoke." Some persons, in interpreting what Catherine said, begin later on to claim that "France" was written, for example Sister Tanguy (PO, sess. 24, in DChD 2, No. 906 [p. 229]).

¹³⁰ The accounts from 1836, in DChD 1, No. 298 (p. 235), No. 299 (p. 241), No. 368 (p. 264).

¹³¹ DChD 1, No. 456 (pp. 292-295), and No. 632 (p. 345).

¹³² Although he had asked the visionary to write down her experiences he did not publish them. That is how he acted in the case of the apparition 18-19 July 1830, the vision of the Cross or of St Vincent's heart.

¹³³ Even if he referred to it, it was not, for whatever reasons, included in the report.

¹³⁴ DChD 1, No. 298 (pp. 235-236). In all his previous accounts he never mentioned it, because it was linked to the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, which he did not accept. He did not mention it until the diocesan process ordered by the archbishop of Paris, H. Quelen.

¹³⁵ The same opinion is put forward, for example, by CRAPEZ, *Message*, pp. 34-36; LAURENTIN - ROCHE, *Catherine Labouré*, pp. 76 and 78.

helpful here;¹³⁶ from what she says about the conversation between Sister Dufès and Sister Catherine we learn that the rays of light were falling on the hand-held globe, and especially on the spot representing France. Even if this is second-hand testimony it agrees with the statements of Catherine herself, quoted for this very reason. Was the theme of France also present on the globe of the earth under Mary's feet? We cannot exclude this in an unequivocal way. In fact, even if Mary speaks of graces for France and the world before the vision takes on the oval shape (medal shaped), while the globe under the feet is in the "median" phase which follows, Catherine does not approve, and does not deny, that the theme was not still there. If the theme of France had also been present on the globe of the earth under the feet of the Blessed Virgin, this would have been one more proof that the globe switched position and, therefore, that Mary no longer held it in her hands at the moment when the central part had been covered.¹³⁷

h) The conclusion about the theme of France on the globe held by Mary in her hands permits an explanation for a problem brought up by several authors, namely that the rays springing from the rings on Mary's fingers are pointing in the opposite direction with respect to the globe in her hands. Catherine states unequivocally that the rays fall, most strongly, on the spot indicating France.¹³⁸ If the theme of France appears on the hand-held globe (it is at this moment that the phenomenon of the dispensing of graces makes its appearance), the rays spreading in all directions should also fall on the hand-held globe of the earth. That is how Sister de Geoffre understood it; the explanatory note about Letaille's sketch is attributed to her.¹³⁹ The question about the rays going in the opposite direction with respect to the hand-held globe introduces a non-existent problem.

i) It is commonly accepted that during the apparition of November (and December) 1830 the Immaculate Virgin was wearing a blue-

¹³⁶ PO, sess. 24, in DChD 2, No. 906 (p. 229). On the matter of the credibility of the evidence, see point 1.2.a.

¹³⁷ Was the globe of the earth, under Mary's feet, also golden? More likely not. In that case, Catherine would have been convinced that the Blessed Virgin was no longer holding it in her hands.

¹³⁸ The 1876 notes, in DChD 1, No. 634a (p. 349); see also the handwritten accounts from 1841 and 1876 in DChD 1, No. 456 (p. 294), No. 631 (p. 344), No. 632 (p. 345); see also the Quentin account of the questioning of Aladel, in DChD 1 No. 298 (p. 235).

¹³⁹ "[...] brightly lighting up the earth, especially against the hands, from which the intensity of light comes," in DChD 1, No. 461 (p. 301).

coloured mantle. The earliest witnesses to this are: Lecerf's picture (1835) and a note by Catherine's confessor, Aladel ("silver blue").¹⁴⁰ Laurentin also quotes the note, mentioned above, which describes Letaille's sketch.¹⁴¹ According to him, the source of these pieces of evidence is Catherine's account. It is not quite as clear as that. Firstly, Catherine never says what colour Mary's mantle was, or that there was a mantle in any of the apparitions! Secondly, Chevalier suggests in his book that, the colour blue for the mantle could come from Aladel (the Blessed Virgin's colour), based on the common belief.¹⁴² He also admits that Aladel could have confused the apparition of the Medal with the apparition of 18-19 July 1830, when Mary wore a garment of white and blue.¹⁴³ Chevalier's statements reveal serious doubts on the matter of the blue mantle. If Aladel's account is not exact, then Lecerf's picture is not a proof, because it is Catherine's confessor who was the source of the information obtained by the artist (see conclusion c).

We can say the same thing about Letaille's sketch, and the accompanying note written by Sister de Geoffre. The description attached to the sketch gives "sky blue" as the colour of the mantle, but that refers back to Aladel's indications and not to Catherine's account. As well as that, the note contains discrepancies with respect to Catherine's account: the half-moon placed under Mary's feet, which was not there during the apparition (point 1.1.). And then again, in the note, there is not complete agreement with Catherine's version on the matter of the colour of the veil (Catherine remains consistent in her three accounts: "A white veil"; the note is less precise: "Golden veil"). With regard to the colour of the mantle, the note, in a similar way, does not stay strictly faithful to the content of the apparition. And on top of all this, Aladel, who asked Catherine the colour of the veil (conclusion c), in his accounts avoids any mention of this and its white colour; only once does he write, and then enigmatically, that it was the "golden veil."¹⁴⁴ All this generates doubts which cast their shadow over the story of the blue mantle.

¹⁴⁰ Evidence dated 16 February 1836, in DChD 1, No. 298 (p. 235); see also the necrology notice by Sister de Geoffre, 1 January 1878, in DChD 2, No. 655 (p. 86).

¹⁴¹ *Vie authentique*, vol. 2: *Preuves*, p. 191, note 110.

¹⁴² *Médaille Miraculeuse*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁴³ A question arises, namely where did Chevalier get this information? In the notes relating to Catherine there is no mention of a mantle (see DChD 1, Nos. 564, and 637-638); does this come directly from her?

¹⁴⁴ See LAURENTIN, *Vie authentique*, vol. 2: *Preuves*, p. 191, note 111.

It is Catherine who produces the decisive proof. In describing the vision of the Virgin with the Globe she stresses that Mary was “clothed/dressed in white,”¹⁴⁵ and for each occasion she mentions only her “dress and veil.” If she never mentions the mantle even once, the following conclusion is inevitable, that there was not one, or that it also was white. It is the description of Mary’s clothing that argues for the absence of the mantle: she was wearing a “[...] high-necked” dress, up to the neck, down to the ankles, with long sleeves; moreover, the veil on her head reached down to her feet on both sides!¹⁴⁶ In the description of what Mary was wearing there is no room for a mantle; the veil is her outermost garment. Nor is there a mantle on the statue of the Immaculate Virgin, made according to Catherine’s instructions. We find the same situation, for example, in Lourdes or Fatima (the differences are merely in details): Mary is wearing a white dress and a white veil which reaches down to her feet.

We think it less probable that Catherine later kept quiet about the mantle (her notes of 1841 and 1876) to fudge the divergence between her description and Aladel’s with regard to the colour “blue” for the mantle, already widely known. In that case, the mantle would surely have been white. The first explanation is more convincing to us: in the description of Mary’s clothing there is no place for a mantle. It is Aladel who adds the mantle (and its colour), basing himself on the contemporary Marian iconography. We accept that what the Immaculate Virgin was wearing during the apparition of 27 November 1830 constituted a white ensemble (blending with the white half-globe; see point 1.1.).

j) Here in our final conclusion we wish to come back to the position of Mary’s hands during the “median” phase. In point 1.2.b. we said that if the central part remained covered, up to the moment when Catherine saw the back, we cannot define unequivocally what the position of her arms was after the globe disappeared from her hands. Fr Aladel, basing himself on contemporary iconography, says they were stretched downwards and that is what we find on the front of the Medal. Here we want to present another possibility touched on above, namely that Mary’s hands were joined in prayer.

¹⁴⁵ In her conversation with Chevalier (*Médaille Miraculeuse*, p. 79), in answer to his question, Catherine described the white of Mary’s clothing as “plain white” similar to the dawn (a faint shade of yellow? That is how Lecerf understood the colour of the veil; see conclusion c.).

¹⁴⁶ DChD 1, Nos. 145-146 (p. 292).

In the first place, according to Catherine, all during the vision known as “with the Globe,” Mary was in prayer to God. After the disappearance of the globe from her hands her arms would naturally assume the position for prayer, as, for example, in Lourdes or Fatima (she is wearing the same white clothing; conclusion *i*).

Secondly, the rays of light, cast by the rings on her fingers, went to create, in the vision of “the Virgin with the Globe,” a sort of pair of fans, or two half-globes of light (one complete globe).¹⁴⁷ With the disappearance of the globe, if her hands were joined in prayer, no alteration was caused to the shape or position of the light. This would be caused at the moment when the arms would be directed downwards; the central part would have been partly uncovered and therefore Catherine would have been able to see the absence of the globe at the height of Mary’s heart.

Thirdly, as eyewitnesses confirm, Catherine often repeated that the apparition in Lourdes took place because her superiors had not carried out Mary’s request, especially the opening up of the chapel in the rue du Bac to the laity.¹⁴⁸ Catherine complained to Mary about this and was going to say at the beginning of 1858 that she would appear in some other place.¹⁴⁹ One month later, 11 February, the first apparition in Lourdes took place. According to Catherine, Lourdes was a complement to what could have happened in the chapel of the Daughters of Charity.¹⁵⁰ If we accept such a dependence of the Lourdes apparition on that of the rue du Bac, Mary could have had her hands joined in prayer in the same way in the “median” phase.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ See DChD1, No. 456.

¹⁴⁸ Her superiors took this decision in view of the character of the house (a novitiate) and the huge number of Sisters, namely about 500 (including almost 300 novices).

¹⁴⁹ After Catherine’s death Sister Dufès found, among her effects, a note written by her with words of complaint, ending with a statement: “[...] show yourself somewhere else!” (the account by Fr E. Mott in DChD 2, No. 770 [p. 137]; see also a letter of Fr P. Hamard, dated 25 September 1878 in DChD 2, No. 676 [pp. 112-113]).

¹⁵⁰ Sister M. Cosnard’s evidence, dated 3 February 1898 (PO, sess 39), in DChD 2, No. 942 (p. 265); also Sister A.M. Transchemer, 1894 (DChD 2, No. 819 [p. 159]). Moreover, Catherine was definitely opposed to Sisters going on pilgrimage to Lourdes, to La Salette or some other sanctuary, saying that they had all that in the rue du Bac (notes of Sister Dufès from 1877, in DChD 2, No. 645 [p. 48]; Sister Transchemer’s account, in the same reference).

¹⁵¹ When we compare the rue du Bac apparition with later Marian apparitions (for example La Salette, Lourdes or Fatima) we get the impression that, in conformity with what Catherine said, they constitute a complement to the first, which surpasses them on certain points. The major importance of

On the basis of the reasons presented we think that behind the bright shining light, when Mary was no longer holding the globe in them, her hands were joined in prayer.



To finish off, we wish to draw attention to the fact that the two aspects of the Blessed Virgin's mission in the vision "with the Globe," suggested in the foregoing points, which has its reflection on the two faces of the Medal, confirms that the content of the front (independently of the position of Mary's arms) accords with the real unfolding of the apparition. This allows us to reject Coste's doubts with regard to the existence of the vision in which the Blessed Virgin held the globe in her hands; the latter constitutes a "matrix" with regard to the Medal, and furthermore a key to explain the symbolism of the letter M with the cross on the bar (otherwise this would not have been possible).

Admitting the phase similar to what is the present form of the front does not mean we are compelled to understand the unfolding of the apparition in the same way as the authors quoted in note 6. As we said, it is the two faces of the Medal which, according to our conviction, comprise the content of the vision of "the Virgin with the Globe" (not a simple sequence of the images and the content).

5. THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF THE MEDAL

We will draw attention to the two aspects of the message. We will base ourselves mainly on the content of the back, because that of the front leads to what is on the back (see the summary of point 3).

the rue du Bac apparition is shown in the following ways: 1) The location: the chapel, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; at La Salette, Lourdes, Gietrzwałd, Fatima and in other cases, it was in the open air. 2) The degree of intimacy at the meeting; during the first vision (in the night of 18-19 July 1830) Catherine placed her hands on the Blessed Virgin's knees, and had a cordial conversation with her for about two hours. In the other cases we have visual contact at a certain distance. 3) The message of the apparition: the vision of the Virgin holding the globe in her hands, and the Medal (especially the back), constitute, because of their content, a heritage unequalled in later Marian apparitions. Even if at Lourdes Mary said of herself that she was the Immaculate Conception (not just having been conceived without sin) this results from the fact that the rue du Bac apparition took place before the proclamation of the dogma, while at Lourdes after the dogma. The truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception was, nevertheless, revealed for the first time in the rue du Bac, which is the source of the Lourdes apparition.

This is the way in which we will present the unfolding of the message, indicated earlier with respect to the vision of the Virgin with the Globe.

5.1. Towards the Ultimate Perfection of the Church

We said that a difference emerges between the Blessed Virgin's mission on the front of the Medal and that on the back. In the first case she asks for and distributes the graces merited by the Son of God (the link: the Son to the human race); in the second, she offers redeemed humanity to the Lord (the link: the human race to the Son). In this latter case there is no question of overcoming the forces of evil. Following the key which we have adopted it is difficult to consent to seeing the same theme, of the battle against the forces of evil, being present a second time on the back. Moreover, if the asking for the graces was separated, on the Medal, from the gesture of offering the human race to the Lord, and even preceded it, we no longer have, in the gesture of offering the human race in the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, a prayer for the graces in the combat against evil. We believe that the gesture of "offering" on the back focuses on a different aspect. Basing ourselves on the applied analyses we have the right to believe that the mystery of Christ's Church, expressed on the back of the Medal, is an announcement of its ultimate perfection. After the combat against the forces of evil by means of the distributed graces, and the announcement of the definitive victory over them (front), we have on the back the image of the perfect union of Christ and his Church (image of the stars); understood in this is the union of the Mother and the Son (image of the hearts), as well as of Mary and redeemed humanity (letter M with the cross). The back of the Medal, which by its symbolism surpasses the content of the front, and of the whole vision of the Virgin with the Globe, constitutes the culminating point of the apparition, in the image of the ultimate perfection of the Church.

The image of the two wounded hearts does not contradict the above interpretation, because it does not relate only to the event of Calvary, but rather to its always present effects. It is because of the suffering of the Son, with whom Mary suffered through perfect union, that the ultimate victory and the perfection of Christ's Church are possible.

We can therefore define the sense of the golden globe offered by Mary in the symbolism of the letter M and of the cross (link with the offering of humanity to the Lord in the vision known as "with the Globe"; see point 2.1.b.). If the Blessed Virgin's mission, expressed on the front, leads (by God's power) to the state of complete perfection

of the Church on the back, we see in the gesture in which she offers the golden globe the ultimate perfection of the saved. If the white symbolises Mary's antecedent intact innocence ("clothed in white"), the gold symbolises the recovered innocence of all the rest of the redeemed (image of font and purification: compare Ws 3:5-6, 1 P 1:7, Rv 3:18 & 20, Rv 18:21). We must wait for the fulfilment of the content of the symbolism of the letter M with the cross on the bar, in so far as it is the announcement of the ultimate total perfection of the redeemed, at the moment of the parousia. It is in this context that *the gesture of holding humanity in the hands and offering it to Christ takes on, in the symbolism of the back, a special significance: it is like a supplication by the Mother and Queen for the definitive accomplishment of the history of salvation.*¹⁵² In the key-portion of the vision of the Virgin with the Globe, Mary has her eyes directed upwards;¹⁵³ all the more so as this links up with the message of the symbolism of the letter M with the cross. Moreover, Catherine writes that what she felt is impossible to express.¹⁵⁴

The above interpretation allows us to deepen the symbolism of the twelve stars: the Lamb of God, having the care (with regard to Mary's protection) of redeemed humanity, it is the victorious, triumphant, Lamb of Rv 21 & 22, who is represented there as the light of the world. Thanks to the analogy of the front with Rv 12, the analogy of the back with Rv 21 & 22 seems admissible; in the first case redeemed humanity, accompanied by the mother of Jesus, battles against the difficulties on the road to Heaven; in the second we are dealing with the Church Triumphant, that is with the Church which reaches its ultimate goal, perfection. The link to Rv 21 & 22 becomes probable thanks to the theme of the stars and of the light (a divine attribute) which is found on the back.

The revelation of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, in the words given on the front, takes on a deepened meaning: Mary's perfection (symbolism of "white") constitutes the announcement of the ultimate perfection of all the rest of the redeemed (symbolism of "gold"). The Mother of Jesus takes an active part in the pilgrimage of redeemed humanity towards Heaven: she helps it, thanks to God's strength, to combat Satan's wiles, distributing to it the graces merited by her Son. Mary's heavenly mission, symbolised on the

¹⁵² This is why we pray "Our Father" (Mt 6:10a); see also *Didache*, X, 6. This sense would not have been brought out if the Medal had been made according to Catherine's wishes. The back would have repeated symbolically Mary's asking for graces in the battle against evil (see point 1.3.).

¹⁵³ Catherine's 1841 account, in DChD 1, No. 456 (p. 293).

¹⁵⁴ Her handwritten account from April 1876, in DChD 1, No. 635 (p. 351).

front, leads redeemed humanity to complete harmony with Christ (back), just as the state of the Church presented in Rv 12 leads to the state of Rv 21 & 22. The Miraculous Medal affirms not only Mary's present role in the Church but announces also, in it, the ultimate position of the Mother of Jesus: Mary, in the gesture of lifting up and presenting to the Lord the redeemed world, appears as Mother of the redeemed on their way to Heaven and for eternity. With this conclusion we lead in to the second theological conclusion.

Before passing on to it we wish to draw attention to the fact that, contrary to what is commonly believed,¹⁵⁵ the front has an aspect which is not so much glorious as the sense of the temporal battle against the forces of evil on the road towards the heavenly fatherland (compare Rv 12); as regards the back it does not emphasise the aspect of suffering, but rather the union through previous suffering (image of the hearts), namely, a perfect harmony with Christ to which the entire Church aspires, and it announces its ultimate triumph (compare Rv 21 & 22).

5.2. Mary's Motherly Relationship with the Church

This subject accentuates once more what is on the back: Mary, from the fact that she is Mother of the Son of God remains in perfect union with him (image of the hearts); this relationship constitutes the basis of her motherly link with the redeemed (the letter M and the cross). Mary's divine maternity is present in the foundation of her relationship with the Son and with humanity. The supreme importance of the message of the back with regard to the front¹⁵⁶ leads to the conclusion that Mary, as she is presented in the totality of the Medal, appears principally as Mother: first and above all by relationship with the Son of God (actual motherhood), then by relationship with redeemed humanity (spiritual motherhood). The Miraculous Medal confirms this theological truth that Mary is Mother of the Founder of the Church, and spiritual mother of all the redeemed. If the symbolism of the twelve stars expresses the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church (point 2.3.), Mary's motherhood with respect to Christ also embraces the Church founded by him. The perfect union of the Mother and the Son is written into her perfect union with the Church, and allows us to expand the maternal relationship with the Son to include all the

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, FEUILLET, *La doctrina Mariana*, in: *Las apariciones*; ZEDDE, *Medaglia Miracolosa*, and others.

¹⁵⁶ See the summary of point 3.

redeemed. Mary, being indissolubly united with the Church, is at the same time Mother of the Church. It is the back of the Medal which shows this truth, in presenting the reciprocal relationships and the position occupied by Mary.

The theme of the twelve stars, as we have shown, transfers the emphasis from the vision of the Virgin with the Globe to the back of the Medal (and to the Medal itself). In the same way, it transfers it from the title "Queen of the World" (Catherine understood the vision in that way) to the title "Mother of the Church." In the overall message of the Medal (in its present form) the truth of Mary's maternal relationship with the Church is superior to the title "Queen of the World."

In spite of the state of affairs presented above, the titles "Queen of the World" and "Mother of the Church" have the same perimeter: if Christ's Church embraces the entire world, the title of queen of the world covers the same area as her maternal relationship with humanity. That is why Mary's maternal relationship with the Church, on its way towards the state of ultimate perfection, is also there in the composition of the front of the Medal: the motherly care for the people of God on pilgrimage is shown by her powerful sharing, by means of the graces asked for, in this people's combat against the forces of evil. The message of the front remains in agreement with the way the Blessed Virgin is presented on the back. The two faces of the Medal, although with differing emphasis, make up a guarantee of Mary's motherly protection.

Mary's maternity with respect to the Church has a hint of mediation. Her mediation, in what concerns the distribution of graces on the front of the Medal, does not give rise to doubts: we see it as being part of God's will, which is the result of the role she played in the redemptive mission of the Son of God and the position she occupies in the mystery of the Church. We are dealing with the mission of the heavenly Auxiliatrix in the present stage of the history of salvation. The second type of mediation is the accomplishment of the present mission, a temporal one. By the gesture of offering, she presents humanity, redeemed from its sins, to the Lord, which attains its ultimate perfection. This second aspect of her mediation reveals Mary's unusual position, which goes far beyond that of all the rest of the redeemed.¹⁵⁷ Mary's mediation, in so far as she is Mother

¹⁵⁷ *Lumen gentium*, § 53. Note the contrast between the symbolism of the golden globe and the white of her clothing (and of the white half-globe), that is to say, of the symbol of her intact innocence and of her perfect union with the Son of God (see point 1.1.).

of the Church, is characterised by her twofold mission and the two-way link between the Saviour and humanity.

The Blessed Virgin's maternal mission on the front leads to what is on the back: Mary, as Queen of the World and Mother of the Church, shares the lot of redeemed humanity, and by dint of the graces merited by Christ, supports it on the way towards perfect union with him.

PS: To the Redeemer of humanity and to his mother and ours, in gratitude for the grace of holy baptism which was administered on 27 November 1960, the First Sunday of Advent, and the one hundred and thirtieth anniversary of the apparition of the Miraculous Medal.

The Author

Translation: THOMAS DAVITT, C.M.

An Event for the Jubilee Year!

A NEW LETTER OF SAINT VINCENT

*The Discovery of an Unpublished Letter of Saint Vincent
has Just Been...*

by Bernard Jean Koch, C.M.

When Father Philippe Lamblin, surfing the Internet, discovered that the Archives of the Company of Jesus in France possessed an autograph letter of Saint Vincent, he contacted the Archivist, Father Bonfils. It was, indeed, a letter of our Founder, dated January 23, 1648, but no mention of the addressee was given, so its existence remained unknown until now. We were planning to go to see this precious document, when Father Bonfils, authorized by his Provincial, offered to make us a gift of the letter. We came into possession of it on Thursday, November 19, in Vanves. Father G. Gregory Gay, who was in Paris at the time, expressed our deepest gratitude to Father Grenet, Provincial of the Jesuits, and to Father Bonfils as well. We add our own gratitude to this.

Father Bernard Jean Koch has done an initial transcription and analysis of the letter.

The text of this letter is given here (in modern spelling);¹ *it is to be placed in Volume III of Coste, p. 267* [English edition, New City Press]:

1009a. – **To?** [*The sheet with the name of the recipient and the address is missing.*]²

Sheet 1 front

Paris, January 23, 1648.

The grace of Our Lord be with us forever.

I just received your letter, and have been greatly consoled by it, both for your **?safe?** ~~and~~ [*Crossed out. He had begun to write*

Original autograph letter. Gift of the Archives of the Company of Jesus of Vanves (*originally in the Archives of the former Jesuit Province of Champagne, France*) to the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris, received Thursday, November 19, 2009.

¹ In the transcription of the original, the spelling of the period has been respected, particularly in order to facilitate the verification of the readings; a transcription in modern spelling follows. For the sake of clarity, pagination has been added and some paragraph breaks skipped; those of Saint Vincent himself are indicated by a blank line. The disposition of the text on the pages is *in italic bold*. The reconstructed parts of abbreviations are in italics; crossed out words and erasures are also noted; doubtful readings are placed between two question marks and are **in bold**. For some names of confreres, only the initial is given, followed by a period; SV XIV, as indicated in the note above, has allowed them to be identified.

² Everything is made clear in SV III, thanks to the information given by Father Coste, and in SV XIV, as well, regarding the various names, beginning with the letters to Antoine Portail, who, after being in Rome, where he was on October 4, 1647 (p. 246), was in Genoa on December 20, 1647 (p. 258). M. Vincent writes to him there, mentioning, among other things, the need for a Superior in Marseilles, where Jean Chrétien is not doing well. The day after writing this letter, he informs the Duchesse d'Aiguillon of the plan to send Firmin Get there (letter of January 24, 1648, pp. 267-68), while speaking about Lambert and Guillaume Delattre for Marseilles. Then on February 7, 1648, he writes to Antoine Portail (p. 271), who is in Marseilles, announcing the arrival of confreres for Rome and Marseilles, and, on February 14 (p. 273), telling him (that he has chosen) Guillaume Gallais and Firmin Get for Marseilles.

We can conclude, then, that the *addressee is Antoine Portail*, who was passing through Marseilles and whose name is repeated at the bottom of the front of sheet 1.

This letter is an important link in that chain of letters from 1647-1648. It shows us once again that Saint Vincent could be, at the same time, hesitant and prudent, and that he knew how to seek advice and to ask for information before taking a decision. Here, as elsewhere, he shows himself to be a man of discretion.

"landing," thinking Portail had come by sea from Genoa to Marseilles] arrival in Marseilles and for all the things you tell me, for which I thank God.

I ask Him to bring you back here in perfect health, *and* laden with merits [*this word is repeated because the first one was blotted by too much ink on the pen*].

I am hard pressed regarding the choice of a Superior for Marseilles; we need *Monsieur* Lambert here; *Monsieur* Codoing might be among our first thoughts because of the proximity of the Bishops of Agen and Condom, and [?] they will be greatly annoyed if we move *Monsieur* Delattre far away. In addition, he has some traits less in keeping [*two letters hidden under a fold in the paper*] with what is needed. *Monsieur* Gautier, Superior in Richelieu, seems more suitable, (but) there are some problems in taking him from his post.

Monsieur Portail³

[there follows, written along the left margin]

and to find someone who has the necessary qualities to replace him. The thought has occurred to me to send you *Monsieur* Gallais. We brought him here seven or eight months ago; I think he would do a good job and is gracious with outsiders.

Sheet 1 back

and because a Superior is needed right now, from what you tell me, we could send him with someone who is *reg* [*crossed out*] more regular, who can represent him and can see to regularity. *Monsieur* Watebled **?mgr?** **?mei?** **?verrai?** comes to mind, or *Monsieur* Dufour, but the first is in Saintes, where he is really needed, *and* the second is in Sedan,⁴ from where he could be recalled with less difficulty. He could also be accompanied **?by?** *Monsieur* Jet and another young priest, who has been working in Saintes for a long time. There is also a ~~elerie~~ or [*crossed out*] subdeacon, *Monsieur* Gondrée. The first can teach in the Seminary; you would not believe how learned he is *and* is really good at what he knows. These men will be

³ This name — Portail — written by itself at the beginning of the last line, breaks up the sentence: it could be a reminder to the addressee.

⁴ For Claude Dufour in Saintes, see SV XIV, p. 186; for Watebled, see p. 646. SV XIV, p. 230, indicates that Gallais is no longer in Sedan in 1648, and the other names on p. 560 do not appear in this letter, except for Claude Dufour....

accompanied by seven or eight students or *[crossed out]* most of whom are ready to receive Holy Orders first in Rome. Some of them have finished their Theology, others part of it, and just one who has done

[there follows, written along the left margin]

only his *philosophy*; he is the one who had a post in Rome *and* sold it in favor of the Company. He is someone worthy of consideration.

Sheet 2 front

I think it would be a good idea for you to conclude matters *and* leave as soon as you have finished the ~~Miss~~ *[crossed out]* visitation, unless you see some problem with leaving *Messieurs C. [Chrétien]* and *S. [Sicquard]*⁵ together. I hope to have those men leave at the end of the month, in ten days at the latest.

It will be very difficult for *Monsieur S.* to get along with *Monsieur G. [Get]*. I think it will be well *[word made illegible by a wavy line]* to have him come back here, or have *Monsieur C.*, *and* one or the other go to *Anessy [Annecy]*, where you will find *Monsieur Guérin*, who cannot go on any longer and is crying for help to be relieved; in which case, that would leave four priests in *Marseilles*, in addition to *Monsieur Dufour* and a clerical student. You are right not to **?arrête?** *[arrêter = define]* the Rules of that house and the hospital now. These **?same?** Rules have to be practiced for a long time before putting them *[definitively]* in writing in **?este? ?ij? ip?**

Two things *[an "s" is obscured by the fold of the paper, as well as the following lines]* will cause us difficulty in the future: the work in the hospital and that *[crossed out]* the role on the Board of Administrators. Our Lord will take care of that, if He pleases. I am sorry *Bishop L.*⁶ is not feeling well,

Sheet 2 back

For the rest, it will be well for you to conclude the matter of that *[crossed out]* the house you mentioned to me. *O Jésus*, *Monsieur*, please do everything you can for that, *and* to satisfy *Bishop L.*

⁵ See SV XIV, p. 378, for the personnel of the Marseilles house.

⁶ Which one? The Bishop of Marseilles was Bishop Gault.

That, Monsieur, is what I can tell you for now, except that I told you **?au?** before that ~~time~~ [*crossed out*] a longer time is prejudicial to the success of visitations, and that I am, with the heart Our Lord knows, your humble servant,

Monsieur,

Vincent Depaul
Unworthy priest of the Mission [*sic*]

May Saint Vincent help those who, like him in 1648, have the responsibility of naming persons for positions of authority and give availability to those who accept them!

Translation: MARIE POOLE, D.C.

+
De Paris le 23 Janvier 1648

Monsieur

La garde de vostre sçavoir joint avec
vostre lettre, et en fin vostre fort console
faue pour vostre ^{bonne} succ^{esse} a Marcell
que passe tous les choses que vous un
dites dou je vous gratie a Dieu
ne priez que vous ramenez les en parquie
faut, & charge le ~~meille~~ merite,
je me trouue enperche sur le subat
du 15^o du sup^o pour Marcell, nous
avons besoin des M^r Lambert, Moni
Toung pourroit rentrer dans les provinces
pensees, et aussi de la proximite, de
M^r Maquere de Agne et de Condom est une
jont ferchez se ton ~~de~~ M^r de la Roche
lequel outre cela a quelques conditions
moultz reportant a ce quel fuit, M^r
Gautier sup^o de Richelieu son ~~de~~ plus propre
dye a quelques difficultez a le faire de son poste
M^r Portail

est a faire une quelcun que n'est
n'estre a son place, la pousse une velle
de l'air de sept ou huit May que nous
d'une semaine quel fait c'est en, et a
les qualites n'estre pour
le plus de ce que nous
vont de ce que nous
vont de ce que nous

First page, front, of the letter.
At the bottom of the page, the name Monsieur Portail
is written, leaving no doubt as to the addressee.

je pense que vous ferez bien de vous
 excuser de la part de ceux que vous avez
 écrits la ~~Mess~~ rigide, si ce n'est que vous
 vous de l'incriminer à l'issue M^r S.
 de M^r S. je pense faire partie de M^r
 de la fin du Mois dans dix jours au
 plus tard.

Il sera fort difficile que M^r S.
 puisse s'occuper avec M. G. je pense que l'
 sera bon ~~me~~ de le faire venir

ou M^r ^{l'un ou} de l'ambassade à Amst^r ou vous
 trouverez de l'argent qui sera plus
 qui vous aide pour être déchargé

Il restera en ce cas quatre personnes à aller
 aller outre M^r Dunster, & un grand

vous avez raison de ne pas arrêter
 les règles de votre maison de l'hospital
 à présent, il faut les garder long temps au
 présent les mêmes règles, au cas que de
 traduire en esprit

Dans ce cas, nous serons difficile à
 traduire les règles de l'hospital & de la usance
 au cas de l'Administration, nous serons y
 pour donner tel conseil y je suis en prison
 de l'Administration qui se fait en l'année 1,

vous ferez très au regret de vos amis
 la faire de dans la Maison, dont vous m'avez
 parlez, O je suis Merveilleux j'attends si vous
 Vient tout ce qui se pour red pour la
 & pour le faire agréer à Monsieur

L' Voilà M^r ce que je vous puis dire
 pour le présent jusqu'à ce que je vous ai
 dit au bonjour que le bon plus long
 temps tant au bon jours de la fête &
 que je suis de cœur que un fait
 fait ~~un bon jour~~
 Monsieur
 VM centi Des all
 Indigne f^r de la M^r