

«Also ~  
| VOW  
zeal...»

PART I    FOURTH VOW  
PART II   THE CONSTITUTIONS



Engraving by G. Acquisti in the first Constitutions of O.L.C. of the Good Shepherd of Angers, printed in Rome in 1836 by Salviucci Printers.

*STUDIES ON GOOD SHEPHERD HERITAGE*

"ALSO, I VOW ZEAL"

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October 22, 1985

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Dear Sister Patricia

Sister Bernadette brought to my attention your request to publish writings of Sister Rose Virginia Warnig as described in the attached copy of subjects treated.

The General Council gives its approval for the publication of these materials as the work of your province.

We hope that our sisters will be stimulated to a greater love and knowledge of St. Mary Euphrasia and the Congregation.

In Jesus



Sister M. Gema Cadena  
Superior General

Dedicated to  
Sister Patricia Maloney RGS  
Provincial Superior of  
the Cincinnati Province of the  
Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
who encouraged this project  
and made it possible to  
realize it

*STUDIES ON GOOD SHEPHERD HERITAGE*

PART ONE - PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
FOURTH VOW OF ZEAL  
OF THE SISTERS OF  
THE GOOD SHEPHERD

PART TWO - THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE CONSTITUTIONS  
OF THE SISTERS OF  
THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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Edited by Sister Marjorie Hamilton RGS

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## PERSPECTIVES ON THE VOW OF ZEAL

### INTRODUCTION

*It is a generally accepted fact that our Institute was founded only for love of souls. For I had no great talents, nor have I done anything great. I only loved... but I loved souls with all the strength of my own soul! (1)*

*...I vow Zeal committing myself to live and work for the salvation of souls, especially those to whom I am sent...(2).*

We Sisters of the Good Shepherd are gifted with a Fourth Vow. This vow, its spirit and meaning, stamps us with a special quality which has everything to do with who we are. It is of the essence of our Good Shepherd way of life.

Yet, our written literature about this vow does not equal in quantity its importance to us. Saint John Eudes, who initially gave the vow to us through the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, left little direct teaching about it. What we do have from him, however, testifies to his deep esteem for it.

The first formal written concept of Saint John Eudes concerning the Fourth Vow is in his *WISHES*, which form the preface to his constitutions of 1679. Briefly this is his thought: the general focus of our lives and activities should be to arrive at union with God and the

Church, and to labor with zeal for the salvation of our neighbor. The means at our disposal are prayer, the example of a holy life, and teaching, and especially the actualization of our Fourth Vow.

By doing this we can arrive at a dynamic holiness which makes us pleasing to God and diffuses itself in the hearts of all the People of God. It is the Divine Heart of Jesus who is the source of Institutes who work for the salvation of souls, for that is why Christ came into our world. Our Lady is intimately connected with Christ's redeeming mission, therefore Father Eudes was inspired to dedicate and consecrate his Institute of Our Lady of Charity to Mary. He invites the sisters to imitate the virtues of this compassionate Mother. Father Eudes then appeals to the King and Queen of heaven whose hearts are inflamed with love for us. He requests several singular favors for his sisters, among which the favor that our hearts may be so many living Gospels, and be filled with the most ardent zeal for the salvation of souls...that we form but one heart in charity among us, and thus be one heart with the heart of Jesus and Mary, by virtue of divine love.

In the second part of his WISHES, Father Eudes gives us an even stronger Marian orientation. If we are one with Mary we cannot but be one with Jesus. For Mary is the first *"perfect member of the Mystical Body of Christ."* He repeats:

*May the zeal of Mary for the salvation of souls devour you!...so that you may faithfully live your commitment to God, especially the Fourth Vow to employ yourselves in the conversion and instruction of souls who have wandered from the right path.*

Our next official source is Father Eudes' First Constitution; that is, the first chapter, or fundamental constitution, in which he spells out the principal and particular goal or end of Our Lady of Charity, that which makes his Order an apostolic one and distinguishes it from other religious orders. In this constitution Father Eudes expounds on the excellence of the Fourth Vow, and the value of a soul his famous dictum adopted by Saint Mary Euphrasia – *"a soul is of more value than a world."*

Father Eudes insists that our duty is to become worthy cooperators with Jesus Christ in the work of saving souls He redeemed with His own blood. All our person is engaged, mind, heart, care, work, affection. He explains the conditions of the persons who seek the sisters' help, their personal freedom, their

response to God's touch. There seems to be an urgency to reach those open to conversion. In order that the sisters have more time and energy to fulfil their first and principal employment to labor for the salvation of souls, he provided that they pray the *LITTLE OFFICE OF OUR LADY* instead of the *CANONICAL OFFICE*. He then declared he would change any article in the constitutions which impeded the living of the Fourth Vow. Finally,

*When you have occasion to help a soul- which will happen frequently if you are attentive - never pass it by. First, ask Our Lord for His grace, then undertake it according to your state and ability. Give it all the care, diligence and affection possible as to an affair of the greatest importance, as if all the temporal possessions and lives of the whole world were at stake. And do all purely for love of Jesus and that God may be loved and glorified in souls for all eternity. Realize that you should consider it a very great grace and blessing to spend all your time, your strength, your whole life and all the treasures of the world, if you possessed them, to aid in the salvation of a single soul for whom Jesus shed His blood, spent all His' time, His strength, and His whole life (3).*

This is the spirit which Father Eudes inculcated in the sisters in living their Fourth Vow.

Father Eudes' fundamental constitution continued to be a part of our own. Our 1955 edition greatly modified it in an effort to modernize the language and translation and adapt it more to our Good Shepherd spirit. In this edition we formally entitled our Fourth Vow, *Vow of Zeal*. Our 1969 and 1985 editions adopted a completely new format but maintained Mary Euphrasia's definition, "*Vow of Zeal*." In them we find expressed the spirit which moved both Father Eudes and Mary Euphrasia but not necessarily their direct words or teaching on our Fourth Vow.

Our foundress, Saint Mary Euphrasia, incarnated this "humble glory of Our Lady of Charity" obtained from the Church by Saint John Eudes. She augmented the gift of the vow by adding her own insights and direct experience. Her legacy to us is characterized by her unique world-wide zeal. It expanded our objective, as well as our geographic boundaries, to universal dimensions. A third characteristic of her legacy is a biblical orientation to the Good Shepherd as our model in living this vow. She developed this teaching in her conferences to the novices between 1835 and 1855. Also in her cor-

respondence she frequently alludes to the meaning of the vow and the implications of living the zeal of compassion and mercy of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Her biographies and the documents used in the beatification and canonization processes add insights on our saint's living of her Fourth Vow of Zeal.

In the pages which follow, I do not pretend to exhaust any of the above sources, but I have drawn from all of them. Actually, I have limited myself to what I consider to be essential elements. My hope is that what I have begun will stimulate further study and deeper reflection on our great gift in this vow. As Mary Euphrasia repeated,

*Let us ponder over the mystery and the grace of our vocation. Let us humbly and courageously admit that we have received a great gift in our Fourth Vow. Through it we have before us our whole life career.*

In subsequent chapters I will touch briefly on 1) the vow in general; 2) Church-related elements; 3) the vow and our life in common; 4) to whom is the vow directed? 5) and finally mystical/ascentical implications of the vow.

## Chapter One

### ***THE VOW IN GENERAL***

#### *EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO THE VOW*

Both Father Eudes and Mary Euphrasia were steeped in scripture. Mary Euphrasia even said quite simply that she had been granted a special understanding of the scriptures. It is not surprising that biblical terms are prominent in her conferences and letters.

Other terms used in connection with our Fourth Vow strike our ears a bit more harshly at times. They seem more suited to another era. But, when pondered more at length, these words unveil deeper meanings which were of much significance to our Foundress. We will look at some of these: *lost, conversion, salvation, little ones, soul, penitents, penance, lab or for.*

The significance to Saint Mary Euphrasia of the above terms flows from her spiritual theology. Hers was a theology of love and of faith in God's fidelity, for Christ our Good Shepherd has accomplished the total human and spiritual redemption of humanity. This redemption and salvation is the birth right of every child of God, of every person. Each is called to inherit the fullness of love which abides in God (4).

This understanding of God's plan of salvation gave birth in Mary Euphrasia to her inspiration concerning her institute's role in the plan of merciful love: from all eternity God desires nothing more than He desires the salvation of souls. The Father desires that not even one of His little ones be lost. Created in love, for the praise of His glory, endowed with mind and will, a soul is of infinite value.

Therefore, to help one who is lost, to will to reflect back the image of love, and thus to realize God's will, is a greater work than to create a world (5).

We humans are created in love and for love. To love and to be loved is essential to our *raison d'être*. *To be lost* therefore can be seen as rejecting His love, more or less willfully, more or less knowingly, straying from His love, and so being deprived of its light and warmth. *To be lost* means to be in conflict with love. *Conversion* brings forgiveness and a rebirth of hope and love. *Salvation* is the experience of love and the state of being able to return love. It means to be reconciled with the Father of love, with self and with society. By *little ones* Mary Euphrasia referred to the poor in spirit in the biblical sense: those denied status in society, the most humble, the poor politically, spiritually, psychologically, emotionally; those who dared not hope or love (6).

The term *soul* for Mary Euphrasia meant the total person in the human, spiritual and social dimensions. One of her recent biographers writes,

*In Mother Pelletier's estimation, conversion and a healthy social life are inseparable. The whole person is her constant concern. Her genius in the Church is to restore, to re-educate, to recreate, to save. She seeks out the lost and the abandoned, and each one is recuperated for society in the measure each one is grafted to the Vine, plunged into the love which saves and vivifies (7).*

These concepts are expressed in Mary Euphrasia's conferences at least twenty-five times (8).

Mary Euphrasia's motto, "*the glory of God and the salvation of souls, this is my life!*" which we find in her conferences and letters, rests on the above convictions and values. And so does our Fourth Vow (9). God's glory is realized in the fulfillment of His purpose in creating us and His universe. His purpose is to share with us and with all human beings, now and forever, His own life of love as Father, Word, Spirit. The glory of God therefore is the visible embodiment of this divine life. As our belief in the Father's unconditional love deepens, we learn to express love toward more and more of His children, so that our world is ever more filled with God and becomes more transparent with His love.

The *Kingdom* which Jesus preached is a state in which all are to

be united in Christ Jesus in love for one another. Saint Mary Euphrasia taught that this love spells continuous forgiveness, like God's forgiveness of us. It is of the essence of our special mission as Sisters of the Good Shepherd to cooperate in bringing forgiveness about, to help it be realized in and for those socially and spiritually degraded, thus without hope and love. For Mary Euphrasia, the social/moral/spiritual dimensions are always interrelated.

Saint John Eudes had spoken of *erring souls*, meaning those living outside accepted social and religious norms. They were the outcasts, those removed from love. In the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, *Penitents* were understood to be persons voluntarily seeking help in order to live morally and spiritually acceptable lives. The term was not derogatory but with time did become less acceptable, even by the latter part of the nineteenth century. So, we hear from those decades, *tiny tots, little ones, teenagers, big girls* expressions Mary Euphrasia thought less judgmental in tone. She often addressed the girls endearingly as *my little lambs*. She once told her *penitents* she herself was the first *penitent*. *Penance* in Saint Mary Euphrasia's time, was a voluntary love-offering to the God who loves and saves. It was not a punishment imposed by persons in authority.

The phrasing of our Fourth Vow through our history deserves explanation also. Our Foundress emphasized in her conferences the deep meaning of the words of the formula.

We used to say, "I...vow to labor for the salvation of souls in the apostolate of the Congregation" (10). Or, as our 1985 Constitutions read, "*..I vow zeal committing myself to live and work for the salvation of souls, especially those to whom I am sent*" (11). To Saint Mary Euphrasia the words *labor* and *work* sprang from reflection on God's abiding presence in creation and redemption as an ongoing labor or work of love, the labor of the farmer tilling the soil and waiting, the labor of giving birth, and the process of growth through learning, suffering, joy. These, she taught, reflect in a special way the process of spiritual regeneration in grace, hope and love, to which our Fourth Vow refers. In all this labor and work there is entailed dependency on the Father's love and care (12).

*Salvation* is the labor of turning to God, in love, in a continuous conversion. God is the main operator. Through our Fourth Vow we become His instruments when we extend ourselves to others and enable others to find themselves in the Father's plan of love. We do

this be communicating to them what takes place in ourselves, our transformation into the grandeur of being a child of God. In Mary Euphrasia's words,

*By the witness of our virtue we draw fourth the innate splendor of the souls we guide... by communicating to them God's unconditional love... this is and always will be a lab or of love (13).*

"The apostolate proper to our Congregation" is "those to whom I am sent." One sent is an apostle. We are sent to the apostolate, that special Good Shepherd activity which becomes Good Shepherd because we are sent to it. Being sent by our Congregation and as Good Shepherd, we have a special message of salvation to communicate and to make effective. Being converted and believing the Good News of the Father's love are one and the same thing.

We labor for the salvation of souls in the power of our Fourth Vow through our daily living, our words, our work, our prayer, our actions, and the quality of our presence to persons (14).

Our 1985 Constitutions pinpoint this in the phrasing, "*committing myself to live and work for*" We are to communicate to persons the reality that, as God loves and forgives us, He loves and calls those we serve to express this same love and forgiveness to others. For all of us, the first step toward conversion and salvation is that awareness that I am forgiven, that God loves me; I then want to thank Him by living Jesus' way of love.

We communicate Jesus' love message personally and also as a community of apostles. Therefore we want to be filled personally and as a community with the experience of His love and forgiveness so that we may communicate the same reality to others, especially those closed to love, who have not known real love, who have strayed from love, or are hostile to love because of inner conflict. We must often renew our faith in the Father's love for us solely because we belong to Him. His love makes us what we are.

So, our Fourth Vow is a loving and total gift of ourselves to God for His work of salvation. It calls us to do all in our power to enable the *lost* to open their hearts and wills to the newness of life and love created by Jesus the Good Shepherd's fullness of redemption. This is a process for them and for us. For us it is a *life career* as our saint says (15). For, we too *grow* in awareness of our gift of love and forgiveness and trust and imitation of Jesus.



In this sense to work for justice is to work to bring to accomplishment God's plan of love in ourselves, and to simultaneously enable it to blossom in others, preferentially in those to whom we are committed by our Fourth Vow, to whom we are sent. This is the justice Jesus spoke about. Saint Mary Euphrasia says it is an obligation of justice for us to work for the salvation of souls (16). There will always be persons who, not able to experience human love, have great difficulty in believing in the Father's love, persons who do not know that the Father loves us because we are His.

### *Sr. MARY EUPHRASIA 's EXPERIENCE OF MISSION*

Call and mission are not two distinct experiences. In reality they are one and the same. *"Jesus the Good Shepherd has called us to live in union with Him and continue His redemptive mission"* (17).

Saint Mary Euphrasia's experience of mission clarifies this for us. When she was seventeen, Rose was a student at the Academy of the Christian Association in Tours, France. One of her close friends, Angelique, confided to her that she had decided to become a Carmelite. Now, from early childhood Rose had dearly loved St. Theresa of Avila and had chosen her for her special patroness. Nevertheless, her immediate response to Angelique was, *"As for me, I want to save souls."* Rose confided to her friend that when she had made her First Communion six years previously she had experienced a call to follow Jesus as a religious. But she was not sure as yet where or how she was to carry out this call. All she knew was that her vocation was to save souls.

Rose Virginie began to be pressured by her teachers, her peers, her intimate friends, her family:

*If you have to be a nun, join the Carmelites, or the Ursulines, or the newly founded Religious of the Sacred Heart.*

Rose's beloved teacher and friend, Miss de Lignac, had recently left the Association to join the Ursulines, then reorganizing in Tours. She too invited Rose. Madame Chobelet, her mother's friend, pressured Rose to join her secular institute.

But Rose-Virginie would not be persuaded. She was praying, waiting and suffering as only a sensitive young girl can.

Light came in the spring of her last year at school, 1814, as one of

her teachers talked to the students on zeal for the salvation of souls. While speaking, the teacher referred to the convent of Our Lady of Charity across the street, known as the Refuge, and which was just rising from the destruction of the Revolution. "*Those young girls,* " she said, "*are in danger of losing their souls.* "

At that moment something happened deep within Rose-Virginie's heart. She had an inner experience she was never to forget. Many years later she shared this with Mother Peter de Coudenhove, her assistant general, saying, "*This was the origin of my special vocation.*" Later after Mother Euphrasia's death, Mother Peter, as a sworn witness to her heroic virtues, testified that Mary Euphrasia had affirmed this as her "*special vocation*" (18).

The very night after hearing about the Refuge, the young Rose felt she must go there immediately, so strong was her experience of that moment.

So, for Mother Euphrasia, following Christ and saving souls was one calling, one covenant with the Lord of her life. And the Fourth Vow was her part in the covenant, for by it she dedicated herself to the salvation of souls.

### *CHARISM IN OUR HISTORY*

Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience contain a world of mystery. So does our Fourth Vow. Why? Because it is based on a special movement of the Spirit which we term a charism, a charismatic gift which calls and empowers one to undertake a special mission in the Church. A charism is always given by the Holy Spirit for the good of people, for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

According to our recent studies on the historical and theological basis of St. John Eudes' gift (and I repeat, St. John Eudes originated our Fourth Vow), it can be said that the Spirit infused in his heart a sentiment of compassion, of loving mercy towards the women and girls of particular concern to the Heart of God in the seventeenth century, and who had been touched to conversion by the saint's preaching (19).

At first, Father Eudes thought he had done his duty by providing these girls and women with a shelter and some pious ladies to care for them. But the Spirit did not allow him to rest with that accomplishment. He was moved to do something more through a special touch of enlightenment and of love. He wrote in his

*MEMOIRS, "I feel God is inspiring me to do something for these girls and women" (20).*

As his inspiration developed, Father Eudes captured the spirit of the charism he was receiving and expressed it in the words of the Fourth Vow. These words were later lived out in service by the Sisters of his Order, for Father Eudes did not live the Fourth Vow himself. He worked to obtain it for the Religious of Our Lady of Charity.

Almost two hundred years later, Rose-Virginie Pelletier joined his Order, but only after she had personally experienced *zeal for the salvation of souls*. She loved Father Eudes' Fourth Vow, for it made it possible for her to follow her personal inner call.

And Saint Mary Euphrasia was to live her Fourth Vow to the hilt. In her nineteenth century milieu she was called to give Saint John Eudes' vow a new gospel orientation, together with a world-wide dimension. She was called to reflect a new *face of God*, a new vision of His love. Our Fourth Vow enshrines this personal charism of Saint Mary Euphrasia.

Mary Euphrasia discerned her charism in the title Jesus took to Himself, *"I am the Good Shepherd."* Through this title, our charism study tells us, she realized her vocation to:

*incarnate the image of the Father's compassion, the mercy of Jesus the Good Shepherd. ...Mary Euphrasia became in Christ Jesus the missionary of merciful love. The image of Jesus the Good Shepherd shone forth in Mary Euphrasia in all her undertakings. This is her essential message (21).*

## UNITY OF CALL AND MISSION

Theology tells us, *"Mercy is what comes to us from God's active love in our salvation history. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit" (22)*. For Jesus the Good Shepherd is the perfection of human compassion and the fullness of divine mercy. The basis of our Fourth Vow, therefore, is human compassion and divine mercy. Our zeal in compassion and in cooperation with God's infinite mercy opens gentle but powerful floods of saving and sanctifying grace on us and on those to whom we are sent.

Neither Father Eudes nor Mother Euphrasia explicitly called our Fourth Vow a *Vow of Zeal* They called it a *Vow of Charity*. And by

the word *charity* they meant love for God expressed in effective love for our neighbor. Both saints, however, considered zeal and our Fourth Vow synonymous. The term ZEAL is always on their lips and in their hearts. All through the Process of Canonization, that is, as early as 1880 and probably even earlier, the Fourth Vow was always termed *VOW OF ZEAL*.

Both saints attested that the vow's general intention is the salvation of souls. We know that Saint Mary Euphrasia meant by *salvation* the power to accept love and to return it. Both read the signs of their times; times they were called to respond to in a concrete, everyday reality. Consequently, in the practical implementation of the Fourth Vow, both intended it to be directed toward the *most destitute, spiritually and socially*, of the society of their times. They envisioned a salvation brought about by an experience of human compassion and divine mercy.

Later I shall develop more explicitly that *compassion* and *mercy* are special qualities of love. Both Father Eudes and Mary Euphrasia stress that we sisters are consecrated to Christ and to His service by our Fourth Vow. It is the essence of our vocation. It is the reason we are gathered together in Christ's name in community. Both considered the Fourth Vow a commitment *to be* as well as *to do* for the sake of the Kingdom.

A spirituality necessarily flows from our Fourth Vow of Zeal. Father Eudes based his spirituality of the Fourth Vow on an imitation of the burning love of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He discovered devotion to the Heart of Mary at about the time he was considering founding the Order of Our Lady of Charity (1643). Devotion to the Heart of Jesus burst upon him twenty-three years later when he was consolidating his Order of Our Lady of Charity and rewriting its constitutions.

Mary Euphrasia was led by the Spirit to add two specific dimensions to Father Eudes' charism. She gave our Fourth Vow a new Gospel orientation, that of *Good Shepherd*, and she caused it to be spread around the world.

In salvation history she was called to reestablish a Good Shepherd ministry destroyed by the French Revolution and which had existed (1641) at the same time that Father Eudes was founding his Order (1651) in another part of France. She discerned the nature of her charism while contemplating scripture. She gives us the Good Shepherd as our model of *BEING* and *DOING*. In this gift she was

inspired by the Old Testament where God is depicted as shepherd. "I have seen your suffering. I will come to save you, for my compassion is moved for you. I myself will shepherd you..."

And in the New Testament she contemplated Jesus the Shepherd-God with the human heart who, from the bosom of the Father, represents to us the tender and merciful love of the Father. *"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep"* (23). *"My Father does not want even one of these little ones to be lost"* (24).

Saint Mary Euphrasia was thus inspired to live and to activate a philosophy of compassionate care, as well as a spirituality for her sisters of *"putting on the mind, the heart, and the attitudes of Jesus the Good Shepherd."* For, in reality, through our Fourth Vow, we are called to *live in union with Jesus the Good Shepherd and continue His redemptive and saving mission.*

Our call and mission are truly one vocation. Being with Him and following Him means growing into Him.

Mary Euphrasia's philosophy and spirituality marvelously blend the heritage from our spiritual father Saint John Eudes with her special vision and she gives this to us Religious of the Good Shepherd as our personal heritage.

Mary Euphrasia experienced the Eucharist, Sacrament of love and unity, as the compendium of all the mysteries of our faith; therefore, of our spirituality. In His Real Presence, *"the Heart of Jesus is the seat of the Father's love...whose tenderness, care, and concern are reflected in the Good Shepherd of the Gospel"* In the Eucharist the Good Shepherd continues to give His life, gloriously living for us and with us. There He becomes not only our pattern and "divine original" but the very source of our inner and apostolic life -- personally and in community. Everything in our lives is to be regulated by that quality of love with which we have been endowed through our Fourth Vow, the zeal and compassion of Jesus Good Shepherd. In the Eucharist we are nourished, fortified, enlightened, vitalized. In the Eucharist Jesus teaches us and we learn...from Him (25).

Mary, the first member of her Son's mystical body, perfectly mirrors this zeal and compassion in her heart. This same zeal and compassion is shared in by us as we labor to lead souls to Christ's saving love (26).

Mary Euphrasia's second specific contribution to St. John Eudes' charism, to encircle the globe with her zeal, was realized by her foundation and organization of the generalate. This was a novel and extraordinary undertaking for her time. It was the means at the service of our charism: the universal zeal and mercy of the Good Shepherd. Its parallel objective was to maintain unity in the authenticity of our Good Shepherd vocation, and unity in charity throughout her world-wide community. One of her favorite expressions was, "*Our zeal must embrace the world.*"

In her organizing activities, Saint Mary Euphrasia in prayer and consultation discerned the signs of her times and the needs of her times - - historical signs, providential signs, sociological signs, and the voice of obedience. She said,

*I felt in spite of myself that I had to work for the establishment of the generalate (27). And to Sister Dosithea she wrote, Sister dear, it was to you and to me that God first gave the inspiration of the generalate. I shall never forget that moment! You first understood my mission. I was not worthy, but I was chosen, so now I must carry out my mission (28).*

## CONCLUSION

The formula of our Fourth Vow was not always as we have it today. Our charism is a dynamic one, and down the years the formula has been adapted to changing situations. Today, emanating from this process of adaptation, the phrasing of the vow encapsulates the mystery of the gifts of the Spirit to our foundress Saint Mary Euphrasia. And in the gift is her mission, her spirit and her spirituality. For, although originally we inherited our Fourth Vow from our spiritual father, Saint John Eudes, it is *her* gift and *her* vision that we Sisters of the Good Shepherd are called to live.

The Fourth Vow we pronounce is simple, but it contains a world of meaning--charism, spirit, mission, spirituality. Our Fourth Vow is all of this.

## *REFLECTION GUIDE*

The Spirit-given identity of Sisters of the Good Shepherd is in the Gospel vision of Jesus the Good Shepherd, a vision shaped by the spirit of our foundress St. Mary Euphrasia through our CHARISM.

1. I will take a memory-trip back to a first experience of call to follow Jesus: "to live in union with Him and continue His redeeming and saving mission in the Church."

How did this affect me then?

How does it move me now?

2. The primacy of love is evident in our Foundress' whole life and undertakings. Our Congregation came into being through her great love.

What other VALUES do I feel are intrinsic to Good Shepherd life and mission?

Do I fear for the future of our Congregation? If so, what makes me fear?

What makes me confident for the future?

## Chapter Two

### **CHURCH-RELATED ELEMENTS**

#### *THE CHURCH AND OUR FOURTHVOW*

The woman, Mary Euphrasia, possessed strong convictions and a firm faith. For her, God's compassion was found in the Eucharist. Eucharist to her was where the heartbeat of Jesus reveals continuously both His human love for the Father, and the Father's merciful love for His children. The Eucharist she knew as nourishment, light, life, a means through which we are transformed into the Good Shepherd who gives His life and teaches us how to give our lives. And how to live our Fourth Vow.

Mary Euphrasia was keenly aware of the power of the Eucharist, and described it as the ark of our covenant, the covenant of His Blood and pledge of His fidelity. And the Eucharist comes through the Church, its guardian and dispenser.

She knew the Church also as guardian of the charisms of the Spirit. "It was the Church herself who brought our Congregation into existence. So, for us, we have the Gospel, our Constitutions, and our union with the Church" (1):

*Therefore, on arriving at a foundation, consider yourselves daughters of holy Church and sent by her. Animated by these sentiments devote yourselves as apostles to the salvation of souls (2).*



When He laid down His human life for His sheep, Jesus the Good Shepherd left us His Church. Guided by His Spirit, it is His visible presence with us. The Church discerns the various gifts of the Spirit, the charisms the Spirit dispenses for the life and vitality of His people. It is the Church who officially recognizes particular needs and, consequently, recognizes the charisms the Spirit dispenses for these particular needs. A charism plays an important role in the Church's mission, an essential role.

God pursues, and He pursues persistently. The great desire of His heart is to pour out His love on us, to save us. This He does through His gifts of grace, ordinary and charismatic.

Pope Paul VI tells us in his *EXHORTATION* that charisms of religious life are to be understood as fruits of the Holy Spirit ever at work in the Church. There is nothing in them of merely human will or motivation, nor of attitudes belonging to this world (3).

A charism is a movement of the Spirit, experienced as a call, a vocation, a summons. It confers a readiness, a willingness, an empowering, which causes the open recipient to show forth something new about God, to revivify something about God in our salvation history.

Pope Paul VI further tells us that

*it is from its own charism that each religious family will draw its spiritual force. For though the divine call takes on a different shape according to the variants of time and place, yet it always moves on a constant course ,.).*

For Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the new aspect of God's love working in a special way for special members of His Body is a gift He lavished on Mary Euphrasia. We can look back in history and trace the origins of this gift in her.

The Church has recognized our Fourth Vow as an expression of a charism of the Holy Spirit. For twenty years church officials pondered John Eudes' request for the Fourth Vow. Initially, we read in the *ANNALS* the decision was that humanly speaking the Fourth Vow "*was asking too much of these Sisters.*" After eighteen more years of trial, it was given ecclesial approval as an *heroic vow* and capable of *sanctifying those who lived it* (5).

So, from the Church's point of view, our Fourth Vow is expressed

in an approved formula just like the other vows. The vow with its formula was officially approved for John Eudes in 1666. It was approved in 1835 according to our Foundress' version at the time Rome erected the Congregation of the Good Shepherd.

By approving the Vow, the Church has appropriated it as her own. It became and is a part of the Church's life for the up building of the Body of Christ. It is a public vow; therefore, everyone can know what we promise.

This vow calls us to share in the Church's mission of reconciliation. Without doubt the Church in modern times has gained fresh insights into her mission of reconciliation among all people and into the spirit which should guide her in this mission. Religious of the Good Shepherd also share in these insights. Our Fourth Vow, through human compassion and divine mercy, ever seeks reconciliation. *"It is as though God were appealing through us in Christ's name, be reconciled to God and be reconciled to one another"*(6). In this way we share the Church's mission. Mary Euphrasia tells us that when we begin our mission we must realize that it is the Church who sends us.

Practically, our role as reconcilers is to bring peace where there is conflict -- inner conflict within one's self, or with other people, or with God. This role is to lay the groundwork for communion. It is to ease those tensions that set one person against another. By their nature, compassion and mercy cannot take sides with one person against another.

So, our Fourth Vow specifies the way our religious congregation shares in the Church's mission of reconciliation. And our congregation specifies those members of the Body which the Holy Spirit confides to us through the Church for reconciliation. The Church guards jealously the charisms of the Spirit.

Another aspect of our union with the Church is our spirituality. Ours is a spirituality generated by our Fourth Vow and its charism. A spirituality is directed to the holiness of the Church, it belongs to the Church. The Church assures us that our vow is also an effective means of our personal fulfillment in Christ. By living its spirit we can arrive at the full stature of Christ, human and spiritual, to which we are called; that is, to live as fully as possible the human compassion and the divine mercy revealed in Jesus Good Shepherd.

In fine, our Fourth Vow contains the mystery of our whole ex-

istence in and among God's people, His Church. Therefore, it gives us our identity in His Body. It also gives us our identity in our own minds and hearts. Through it we know who we are and what we are about. Our Fourth Vow tells us how to follow Christ.

## *RELATIONSHIP TO OUR OTHER VOWS*

All the religious vows come through the Church. The three traditional vows of Chastity, Poverty, Obedience, which make of religious life a charism in the Church, have a content of *disengagement* from the major pursuits of human life. Our Fourth Vow on the contrary is, first and foremost, an *engagement* to God's concerns for persons particularly in need of an outpouring, a communication of His merciful love. The three vows enable us to live more fully our Fourth Vow. Both Saint John Eudes and Mary Euphrasia tell us that Chastity, Poverty and Obedience are means of arriving at our end, which is to labor for the salvation of souls, as expressed in our Fourth Vow.

Fourth Vows in the Church usually designate a specific ministry among God's people, but our Fourth Vow orientates our entire life. This is especially clear in our 1985 constitutions (7).

The intent of Saint Mary Euphrasia was that, through our Fourth Vow, we would unfold the riches of Christ in His burning zeal for the Father's glory, manifested in His human and divine compassion. She saw this personified in the only title He took to Himself to define His mission on earth, "*I am the Good Shepherd.*" "*Apostolic action belongs to the very nature of our religious life*" (8). And "*Jesus the Good Shepherd has called us to live in union with Him and continue His redemptive mission*" (9). The two movements of call and mission have become one.

Both Father Eudes and Mary Euphrasia teach that we make vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience because we are called to make a Fourth Vow of Zeal. Our Fourth Vow is not an appendix, something added on. This Fourth Vow orientates the way we live in the Lord's company, the way we enter into His sentiments and attitudes and carry on His mission.

To His Church, Jesus Good Shepherd gave the task of continuing His shepherding--*Go and proclaim to all nations; heal the contrite of heart; seek and save the lost, the strayed from my heart; shepherd my people, feed my lambs, feed my sheep.* Through His Church, Jesus Good Shepherd continues to anguish for souls and to pour out

His compassion. And He wants to do this through us. For, the Church entrusts to us a share in her mission of reconciliation and of effecting a return of love for so great a love. This special task is given us by the Church in our Fourth Vow.

Our Interim Constitutions stated that "our Fourth Vow gives a particular apostolic orientation to the traditional vows" (10). Our Fourth Vow therefore explicates our following of Christ in Chastity, Poverty, Obedience.

Also, "*Chastity, Poverty, Obedience free us to be about the concerns of Jesus the Good Shepherd, and continually kindle the fervor of our charity, which is expressed by our Fourth Vow*" (11). That is, the renouncements of the three vows make an ever wider space in us for zeal for the salvation of souls.

Saint Mary Euphrasia added a special note in this context. She taught that our Fourth Vow is the essence of our vocation. The three vows are, as it were, a reinforcement of the Fourth Vow. She is quite forceful on this point:

*Why are we in this world, why are we here gathered in community, why have we left and renounced the joys of family life and all the good things of life? It is not only that we ourselves may reach the fulness of life and love promised us and gained by Christ Jesus for us. Oh, no! We are here to search out those of our brothers and sisters who are out of the way of love so that Jesus' sacrifice of redemption may become effective in their lives too (12).*

Therefore, both the spiritualizing and growth-producing elements in our three vows, as well as their renouncements, are directed toward greater dedication and self-giving for souls the Good Shepherd longs to fill with His love. There is in fact in the four vows an interaction which provides a mutual reinforcement.

### CONSECRATED CHASTITY

This interaction is evident in Saint Mary Euphrasia's life and teaching. By the vow of consecrated chastity, Christ became the magnet, the center of her heart and soul. It is for Him and in Him that we in turn *live and rejoice in being partners in His mission of redemption*. For His sake and trying to be like Him, we strive to be available to His people, with a preferential love for those estranged from Him. For Him we need to be *signs to attract persons to an ex-*

*perience of the Good Shepherd's forgiving and merciful love. At the same time, our Vow of Chastity is directed toward interior freedom and should help us absorb in a mature way the suffering and distress experienced in the mission to which we are committed by our Fourth Vow.*

Through the interrelation of our Fourth Vow and our Vow of Chastity, Saint Mary Euphrasia teaches, we receive a gift of spiritual fertility. As Mary cooperated in the formation of Jesus' humanity, we are called to cooperate in the formation of Jesus in souls who are far from Him but who cannot be happy without Him (13).

In fact, because of this reality, for many years we were given the title of *mother* with regard to our *children*, who hopefully were to find a home with us. When she speaks of the labor of our Fourth Vow, Saint Mary Euphrasia refers us to St. Paul, telling us to make it a labor of love, a bringing to new life, to rebirth in faith and love. Even though the title of mother has been dropped, this spiritual effect of the vow endures.

Finally, our Fourth Vow is capable of gracing us with a singleness of purpose, that of Jesus, who in all things and in all events discerned the Father's will and glory. Being free from other ties, we can reach out in zeal with Christ to encircle the world of souls. "*What a glorious mission,*" says Saint Mary Euphrasia. She urges us to cleave to Christ as a branch to the vine, in order to bear the fruit which God seeks and which the Spirit makes effective through Christ's redemption (14).

For our chastity, says our Foundress,

*must be a chastity inflamed with love for God and for our neighbor...Our chastity should exclude selfishness and apathy... Our Fourth Vow calls for purity of heart. Since we are called to enlighten other souls, our own should be resplendent with all virtues ...So, let us drink in the spirit of our holy Institute, so that it may absorb our whole being. ...Let us live joyfully with our God, love Him, think only of Him, seek nothing out of Him. Let us live and breathe only for Him. May He be our soul's atmosphere! Let us give ourselves unreservedly to God. And let us rejoice every day, for the thought that the everlasting arms of God are around us is the source of the sweetest consolation (15).*

## GOSPEL POVERTY

Mary Euphrasia taught that vowed gospel poverty disengages us from material pursuits and leads us to pool everything, even our very persons, so as to be able to respond to the spiritual and material needs of others. It frees us interiorly and exteriorly to be available to God's little ones, available as to time and talents, gifts of nature and grace, through our prayer, our activity and whatever our work is. For Mary Euphrasia, work is a gift of God which offers the possibility of creativity in communion with the Creator. Our work also associates us with the truly poor who work for their living, as did Jesus and His family in Nazareth. Work enables us to share with others in their need, to give materially for the sake of our mission. For, the spirit of poverty leads us to put others' needs before our own, to forget self for others.

Lived poverty leads to a dependence on God for what concerns ourselves, as well as for what we desire for another's salvation. It causes us to wait on God.

*"It is essential " says Mary Euphrasia, "that we have no fear of poverty or other obstacle to our mission. We must just keep at it like the fisherman who keeps casting his net, always hoping to catch fish. Then leave God to do the rest. We are only His instruments. He desires to accomplish His salvation through us" (16).*

In that spirit we can await His time and His grace, while laboring to lead others to love.

In the canonization process a witness testified that Mary Euphrasia was:

*truly poor in spirit. Her sole treasure on earth was the Blessed Sacrament and the souls redeemed by the Precious Blood of our Savior. Her dependence was the dependence of the truly poor who humbly wait on God. Money was for her a means, never her master. Dependence on God created in her an emptiness that God Himself fills (17).*

Mary Euphrasia referred to Jesus' experiences in Bethlehem, in the garden, on the cross as a type of poverty, of detachment and dependence on God which should characterize our Fourth Vow and our poverty. She said,

*The fruit of real evangelical poverty is a serene waiting*

*on the Lord in humility and hope; and a second fruit is 'evangelical generosity' or charity. Faith in the Father's Providence from whom we receive all as a gift, therefore, opens us to receive ever more. In charity we share all we have and are, for all is gift ... The more we live inner poverty and simplicity of life the greater number of souls we can help materially and spiritually (18).*

Consequently, we want to avoid grounding our security in material possessions or in acquiring beyond our basic needs. In charity, the basis of our Fourth Vow, we try to work to bring about the kingdom of justice and love by the way we use and share our material and spiritual possessions.

### RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE

The vow of Obedience helps us religious to be in a stance of humble and willing openness to God's plan of salvation. It is to be lived out in a relationship of love between sisters and with those in authority roles to whom we commit ourselves for the sake of our mission. *"It brings us to the inner sentiments of Jesus, who declared, 'Behold I come to do your will' and who willingly sacrificed His human life and even His reputation for our redemption.* "Lived obedience leads to a sharing of resources of mind and will in carrying out our mission. Our Interim Constitutions summarized Mary Euphrasia's teaching,

*Realizing we are giving service to the upbuilding of Christ's body, let each of us bring the resources of her mind and will and her gifts of nature and grace to the accomplishment of whatever is confided to her (19).*

Our Foundress assures us that obedience frees us interiorly from our self-seeking, and exteriorly in community to live out our vow of zeal (20). Her teaching is condensed in our Interim Constitutions,

*The whole community shares the responsibility for the fulfillment of our apostolate. By mutual respect, trust and encouragement, in a variety of services we free each other in order to give ourselves to our neighbor with the very love of Christ (21).*

In fact, Mary Euphrasia taught that is why we make the vow of obedience (22). Obedience is for our mission, as was Jesus' obedience. The concept of mission - to be sent, she emphasized, is to obey. "We

*should be ready to be sent wherever there are souls to be saved. ..*

She stressed that everything depends on the fidelity of each sister to the spirit of our Fourth Vow. So, it is vital to understand what obedience in the spirit of our Fourth Vow can mean. It entails responsibility, availability, mobility, yet brings grace and blessings. Saint Mary Euphrasia often invited her sisters to ponder the mystery of the Fourth Vow, which permits us to become "*cooperators with Christ Jesus in His mission to the nations.*" Not to one small house or country, but to the whole world. It is a mission "*rooted in the cross, calling for a total gift of self*" (23).

## CONCLUSION

Being with Him and following Him means growing into Him. The more deeply we grow into Christ through intimate union with Him in chastity, poverty and obedience, the more our Zeal will be inflamed toward the broken members of His body, and the more He can relive His mysteries in us and reach out through us in pardon and salvation and sanctification. "*Let us refer all to our Fourth Vow! It is this vow which guides us, leads us, keeps us*" (24).

*To all who are here near me, and to all who on far away shores are spending yourselves for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, live, multiply, people the earth. Let your vows which adorn you be your guide. Let Zeal be the vessel which carries you forward always* (25).



## REFLECTION GUIDE

Our Fourth Vow provides our identity in the Church and in our own minds and hearts. Therefore, (on arriving in a foundation) "consider yourself a daughter of the Church, sent by the Church. Animated by these sentiments devote yourself joyfully as an APOSTLE to the salvation of souls" (26).

1. What does this say to me today?

By my vow of evangelical CHASTITY my whole person is for Christ. To be for Christ means to be for Him in His estranged brothers and sisters.

2. Can Jesus Good Shepherd touch them through me? heal through me? forgive through me? reconcile through me?

Evangelical POVERTY is Faith and Charity.

3. I will recall a practical instance in my life when I experienced the interaction of my Vow of Poverty and my Fourth Vow of Zeal.

Are my gifts of nature and grace at the service of my love for God and souls?

I vow to...live evangelical OBEDIENCE according to the constitutions of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

4. Do I believe that living my vow of Obedience liberates me? That it creates space in my heart for God's glory in souls?

Am I open to a mature relationship of love in authority-obedience encounters along my day?

5. What signs of our times might affect in a special way our following Christ in POVERTY, CHASTITY, OBEDIENCE, ZEAL IN THE CHARITY of our Fourth vow?

## Chapter Three

### ***THE VOW AND OUR LIFE IN COMMON***

#### *BACKGROUND*

*... You have a sacred, precious jewel confided to you. It is our holy institute you carry in your arms, in your person. Show it to the world, to everyone, in all its beauty (1).*

*Our institute was founded through love. We have all been drawn to it through love... it is love which keeps us here....*

*Let us always be united amongst ourselves. Let there be a holy rivalry among us to unite together in bringing about the noble end of our congregation, the sanctification of souls! (2).*

Our Fourth Vow permeates our entire lives, our personal lives, our community lives, and the development and growth of our congregation through formation and through government. Our Fourth Vow unites call and mission in our religious lives. Saint Mary Euphrasia asks us to reflect on Scripture, where every call and mission is prefigured. It is God who takes the initiative, who calls, who establishes a covenant through the patriarchs and the prophets, who brings a people into communion with Himself and with one another. Call and mission are at the same time both personal and communal.

Our part of covenant is our expressed Fourth Vow. The charism with which He gifts us is God's part. Our charism guarantees God's fidelity in leading us to communion with Himself and with His people in His plan of salvation.

Mary Euphrasia quotes Moses to the people of Israel:

*What has not the Lord done for you? He had guarded you during forty years in the desert without food ever being wanting to you...God Himself dictated His law to you and made a covenant with you. Keep forever the words of this covenant and know that not to you only do I make it, but to all that are present and that are absent, for those living today and those who shall come after...I have set before you life or death, a blessing or a curse. Choose therefore life, that both you and your posterity may live (3).*

### OUR RELIGIOUS FAMILY COVENANT

The Lord's covenant is with Mary Euphrasia's world-wide community. Indeed, she considers each sister an essential participant in the fulfillment of our part of the covenant through our Fourth Vow. We respond through our wholehearted service, with the gifts of nature and grace with which we are endowed, and with whatever competence human learning and wisdom can bring. Therefore, our mission is definitely personal. We are called by name to give service to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. *"Let each one of us bring the resources of her mind and will and her gifts of nature and grace to the accomplishment of her mission" (4).*

But our mission is also communal:

*gathered together in the name of Jesus... we have entered into a covenant with one another for the sake of His brothers and sisters... We seek together and we carry out in community the will of the Father in union with Christ...in the signs of our times...in the needs of the people of God... we search for His will (5).*

From the very beginning of our history as Sisters of the Good Shepherd, our Fourth Vow through our charism was considered a powerful means of openness to the signs of the times and to the future, in service to God's people. Moreover, it was always recognized that, through the power of our charism, all the occupations and the ordinary daily tasks of the community as well as of each individual sister can and should be a participation in Jesus' redemptive life. *"Whatever our occupation, let us always have the intention of laboring for the salvation of souls" (6).*

Vow, a corporate community involvement in each Sister's apostolate became effective. There are interesting comments concerning this in one of our ancient books.

*Even if I am not directly employed with souls, I labor for their salvation, for my community exists only for this end. To serve in any way is to lab or for souls and to serve them (7).*

This echoes St. John Eudes' teaching. In his last homily to his sisters, June 3, 1667, when they were finally permitted to pronounce their vows with pontifical approval, he stated,

*My dear daughters, your spirit is zeal You are now going to pronounce your vows and your Fourth Vow to lab or for the salvation of souls redeemed by the Precious Blood of the Son of God. Remember that it is only for this that your community has been founded (8).*

From these early sources we also learn that it was commonly believed:

*what one does, all do... when one is praying, the whole community prays. When one labors for souls, the whole community is involved. When the community is praying each sister, although absent for charity's sake, also prays ...Our Fourth Vow gives us the power to participate in our sisters' ministry, for we have entered into a covenant with one another for the sake of the Kingdom. Therefore the whole community is involved in whatever each sister is accomplishing for God and souls (9).*

This inclusion of all in the apostolates of one another is not a passive inclusion. It calls for awareness; it calls for an intensity of living in zeal and a deep union and communion with one another in the charity of Christ. So taught Saint Mary Euphrasia:

*We must therefore give thought and offer all we do for the salvation of souls. This should be the end of our thoughts, prayers, actions, indeed of our whole life ...For no matter if we are directly or indirectly employed with souls, our Fourth Vow binds us just the same (10).*

In fact, our book continues,

*there may be a danger if we are not directly employed*

*with souls... We may risk putting zeal for our charge before zeal for souls... the interest of the community before the interest of souls. Our community exists for souls and we would reverse the order should we seek the material prosperity of the community at the expense of the wellbeing of souls (11).*

*To do good to souls, we must put them before self; then they can see that we can suffer and forget self and sacrifice ourselves gladly for them ... We would be sadly mistaken if we thought the zeal and sacrifice of religious who have not made this vow would suffice for us (12).*

These quotations reflect the teaching of Mary Euphrasia to her novices. She saw our Fourth Vow encompassing and penetrating our personal life, our community life and all our relationships. Our 1969 constitutions summarize her teaching: *"By our Fourth Vow of Zeal the whole community shares the responsibility for the fulfillment of our apostolate"* (13). Therefore, *"Different personalities, diverse mentalities and even our limitations accepted, together with our gifts of grace and the activities of each one, contribute to the enriching of the whole"* (14).

Given Mary Euphrasia's mission to recreate the Good Shepherd in Angers and to found a whole new religious organism, she could have opted for any of the several diverse types of religious life and service being organized during her lifetime. But she opted for a religious community committed to her vision of her apostolic mission. In so doing, she left us a balance of community, apostolic activity and prayer.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Our early constitutions had no special chapter on community. They emphasized, however, the requisites of religious living. Mary Euphrasia continually speaks of community in her conferences. Among other things, she tells us *charity* and *justice* require us to be attentive both to our zeal for souls and to our community. It is just as important to be a good community sister as it is to be an excellent directress, teacher, or worker. *"Charity and justice bind us to each of our sisters and to the whole Institute"* (15). The spirit which animates our religious family is mutual charity and zeal for souls. On her deathbed she sought a promise from her daughters, *"Promise me, "* she urged, *"that you will always be united in mutual charity and zeal for souls"* (16).

Our 1969 General Chapter considered it necessary to emphasize community in our Interim Constitutions. This reflects our times, but also aids us in maintaining the original balance desired by Mary Euphrasia.

*The organization of community life shall be suitably adapted to the needs of the religious and of the apostolate. Each sister will then be better able to participate in community and cooperate in apostolic action (17)... Community living is a special source of strength in our mission. Together the sisters share the concern of the apostolate and mutually help, encourage and pray for one another (18).*

Our 1985 Constitutions emphasize we are together for mission. Mary Euphrasia tells us that it is the charity of Christ which urged us into our Good Shepherd community and which keeps us there. Our relationships with one another are to be in the warmth and concern of holy friendships, imbued with the spirit of our charism, which we received through our Fourth Vow. What does she mean but that the spirit of our charism is active also in community in an attitude of loving neighbor as oneself. This entails a compassionate understanding of each one of our sisters, in an ongoing attitude of forgiveness.

For, in community what enriches us are our differences, and these are also what call forth our compassionate acceptance of one another, just as we are. Mary Euphrasia says that a gentle attitude of forgiveness is at the deepest level of compassion. By forgiveness we enter into the other's situation in an awareness of our human condition.

This attitude leads us to a readiness to be servant and to understand what it means to wash one another's feet, as did Jesus. Compassion equalizes, raises up, creates harmony there where the only bond of unity is our love for Christ and our charism of apostolate.

We keep the flame of love for Christ and for one another alive through prayer and through participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Here too we become more deeply committed to the formation of the Mystical Body of Christ, to which our Fourth Vow calls us (19).

Our prayer too should be apostolic, animated not only by a great desire to please God and to glorify Him, but also by a longing to bring the whole world to His love and service, even at the cost of our lives (20).

## ENHANCING UNITY IN OUR WORLD- WIDE COMMUNITY

Mary Euphrasia considers our Fourth Vow a leaven in the life of her congregation, no matter what the culture, country or age,

*Since we are all shepherdesses, we must not be attached to one little corner of the earth. We must rouse ourselves, we must be ever ready to go ahead. One town, one foundation will not satisfy our zeal; it must embrace the world. You will therefore go forward and erect your tents from one end of the world to the other. Wherever there are sheep to be gathered into the fold, we must not fear to go and to pitch our tents on the most distant shores. The conquests we will achieve will be in proportion to the zeal with which we answer the call (21).*

In 1857 in speaking of the development of our Congregation, Mary Euphrasia exclaimed,

*Blessed are you who have seen what you have seen ...A charming picture has been presented to us by the circular letters which we have just received. It is that of a family whose members scattered over various and distant countries are yet closely united amongst themselves in most perfect charity, and all are striving for the same end, the spiritual regeneration of the sheep who have strayed from the fold of the Good Shepherd (22).*

*Oh, let us admire the work of Divine Providence and thank God fervently for it. Let this increase and strengthen our confidence in Him...I always have a desire to share with you all that God has done for us in order to console you and excite your zeal more and more (23).*

*My dear daughters, these are the glorious days of our Institute. By your fidelity you must preserve intact the spirit of this dear Institute; you must constantly renew its primitive spirit... its spirit of zeal of obedience, and of mutual charity (24).. Could it be possible that the day will ever come when our hearts will be estranged? No, never, never! always never! For it would be the death blow of our dear Institute. You will always remain united by the holy bonds of charity and zeal (25).*

## RELATIONSHIP TO FORMATION

To Mary Euphrasia, our Fourth Vow, our spirit of zeal, and our charism are synonymous. She understood that a gift of the Holy Spirit has imparted to us a power of vitality, of adaptability, of growth in true charity, in love and in service.

Therefore, she continually exhorts us to be faithful to the spirit of our Fourth Vow.

*Keep intact this spirit in which you have been formed and for which you have been instructed...Zeal charity and obedience is our spirit (26)..Every member of our Institute has been called and is formed to work for the salvation of souls. This is your vocation. It may be difficult, but it is great, noble and divine in the light of faith. What may be impossible to others is possible to a Sister of the Good Shepherd who gives herself entirely to God and to souls ...So, let our thoughts, our desires, all our activities aim at the salvation of God's dear sheep, following the example of our Savior whose whole life was spent for their redemption and salvation. God desires nothing more than He desires their salvation and sanctification (27).*

Our Interim Constitutions made clear that the whole of formation today, as in Mary Euphrasia's time, should be carried out in such a manner that *"the congregation may be enriched with a greater abundance of spiritual strength and be better prepared to proclaim our message of salvation"* (28).

*Throughout all the stages of formation, our Congregation's apostolic objective is to be considered the principle which influences the entire formation of our members. Given the nature of our apostolate there needs to be a compenetration of contemplation and apostolic activity (29) ...According to personal endowments the sisters will receive the necessary preparation so that the exercise of personal responsibility and a full apostolic contribution may be assured (30).*

Words may differ but our 1985 edition repeats this spirit.

## RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

From Saint Mary Euphrasia's time, both the organization and the



spirit of our government have been influenced by the requirements of our Fourth Vow. In fact, our structure of international government was for the purpose of facilitating the expansion of our mission, and for unity in this mission and in charity among ourselves.

Therefore, since apostolic action belongs to the very nature of our religious life (31) the role of authority or of government is to foster spiritual and apostolic vitality, growth in Christ for the best accomplishment of our apostolic mission (32). Be it on the local, provincial or general level, apostolic effectiveness and spiritual progress (33) are never separated. Spiritual and apostolic vitality and a continuous renewal of our mission in the Church are the role of general government, together with the spiritual and apostolic leadership that is demanded of those in authority (34).

In these same constitutions, the unity of our world-wide community is seen to be fostered by a continuous affirmation of the values of universal love and of availability to the people of God through our mission. This seems to re-echo Mary Euphrasia's delightful experience of 1857 mentioned above.

Concerning the criteria for admission to our Congregation, a responsibility placed on those in authority, from early times it was stipulated that zeal for the salvation of souls has priority, and this zeal could be discerned in the candidate's love or aversion for our special apostolate (35).

### CONCLUSION

Our covenant is personal and communal. Our call and mission are to a world-wide community whose members realize, as our 1979 General Chapter stated, that

*our mission is our whole life. Whatever our age, our occupation or our situation, we participate in the redemptive mission of Christ. Our Vow of Zeal is the expression of our love. It unifies the contemplative and the active dimensions of our vocation and gives a singleness of purpose to all that we do (Toward a New Springtime).*

Our life and our mission are one. Our person and our mission become one by living our Fourth Vow fully, as happened to Saint Mary Euphrasia. However, our Foundress was aware of a progressive unfolding and development of our covenant (36). She tells us that she herself had witnessed a new generation coming into her Institute. She had received ongoing, ever deeper insights into the

meaning of our call and mission during her own lifetime. She declares that new generations will witness further unfoldings of the mystery of our covenant, just as each succeeding prophet was called to proclaim in a new way the ancient truth of God's fidelity to His people.

Our immediate generations of Good Shepherd sisters before and after Vatican II have witnessed the truth of her prophecy. In recent years, throughout our Congregation, we have pondered Mary Euphrasia's call and mission, her life and teaching. This study and reflection has produced a synthesis of the spirit and intention which led and guided her in the unfolding of her great gift expressed in our Fourth Vow.

We realize that each new generation will share in this process of unfolding, for the Holy Spirit is ever creating and re-creating.

Pope Paul VI tells us,

*It is from its own charism that each religious family will draw its spiritual force. For though the divine call takes on a different shape, according to variations of time and place, yet it always moves on a constant course (37).*

And he adds,

*The fervent response to it in a person's life is in terms of first yet basic choices. Fidelity to the exigencies of these fundamental choices is the touchstone of authenticity (38).*

And our Foundress repeats to us,

*Preserve to posterity the spirit of zeal and of union which is the life of our institute...Be faithful to your Fourth Vow. The spirit of our Fourth Vow is zeal for God's glory in the salvation of souls ...Love your mission, love your vocation, love your institute (39),*

And she adds playfully,

*Oh, it is not the walls that I exhort you to love. It is the spirit of zeal and charity which is our characteristic (40). ...Endeavor to accomplish your Fourth Vow in all its perfection. It is summed up in two words, Charity and Zeal I advise you to ponder it, over and over again (41).*

In her admiration she exclaims,

*Why have we not the tongues of all nations that we may proclaim aloud so great a gift! Truly, how precious and magnificent is the portion which has fallen to our share....(42).*



Copy of original marble sculpture of the Good Shepherd found in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus, Rome, dating back to the III Century.

## REFLECTION GUIDE

*"Our mission is our whole life. "*

We bring the past into the present in order to shape our future. History tells us we have before us one of three possible outcomes of our renewal:

EXTINCTION, MINIMAL SURVIVAL, REVITALIZATION.

1. What must we do, personally, as a local community, as a Province, to revitalize our Good Shepherd spirit of ZEAL, CHARITY, OBEDIENCE?
2. How can we be PROPHETIC and at the same time AUTHENTIC in the commitments of our four vows made according to the Constitutions of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd?

Our first sisters, with Saint Mary Euphrasia, had the sense of personal and, at the same time, community responsibility for our mission: so much so that they experienced themselves partners in the common or personal apostolic task, work, prayer that was being accomplished.

3. How can we develop a genuine sense of belonging and identity with our community, -local, provincial, and world-wide - which reflects both *l'esprit de corps* and a healthy individuality?
4. Mary Euphrasia declares (1857) that each Sister is a GIFT to our Community. How can we become gratefully aware of our riches in our differences and graciously affirm them?

Our early sisters had a global consciousness of our Mission - *"not one little corner of earth, not one foundation" - "my heart and mind are wherever there are souls to be saved" - "Not my own soul only, not my own holiness only... away from self to God and His concerns "*:

5. How can we get away from being the center of things and let God's concerns be our centering?
6. How can we broaden our vision and our hearts and our ZEAL to a world-wide dimension?
7. What must we do to "choose life so that we and our posterity may live"?  
Can the three bonds of unity of our first sisters - ZEAL, CHARITY, OBEDIENCE - be our answer again?

## Chapter Four

### ***TO WHOM IS THE VOW DIRECTED***

We ask:

- Why a Fourth Vow?
- What persons were and are the precious objects of this work of the Holy Spirit?
- What is our social and spiritual conversion based upon?  
What are the implications of all this for us today?

#### ***ST. JOHN EUDES' TIME***

Father Eudes' intention in obtaining papal and civil approbation for his sisters from the authorities of his time was threefold. First, he wanted stability for this ministry. Secondly, he wanted to respond to the desire for a vowed life of the pious women dedicated to his work. Thirdly, he wanted to give status in the religious and civil world to a ministry which was not esteemed and appreciated.

We recall that "*those in need of salvation*" in his time were society's outcasts, the vagrants, paupers, women prostitutes. All of these could find material relief and shelter at the General Hospital, a government structure existing for this purpose.

Many female vagrants and prostitutes, converted through Saint John Eudes' preaching, desired ongoing spiritual help. Being as they were outcasts from family and from society in general, they

needed refuge and persons who would help them realize moral, spiritual and social rehabilitation.

Because of the explicit needs of these girls and women, Father Eudes' formulation of the Fourth Vow was explicit. He also carefully spelled out the spirit and the spirituality which flowed from the Vow in his constitutions and its preface. The latter comes down to us today as his *WISHES*.

Through his founding genius, Father Eudes responded to a crying need of his century. One historian of those time writes,

*Prostitution was the greatest sin, as well as the greatest social plague of the Seventeenth Century. Young women abandoned the joys of home and family to become the playthings of society.*

It is clear then that in the historical and social context in which Father Eudes operated, persons who needed salvation were those living outside the accepted social and religious norms and values of the day, the prostitute. They were the "most socially and spiritually destitute" of his time.

## ST. MARY EUPHRASIA

Who was *most in need of salvation* in Saint Mary Euphrasia's day? In giving herself to the Order of Our Lady of Charity in 1814, Mary Euphrasia endorsed Father Eudes' Fourth Vow. The Vow provided outlet for her zeal to save souls.

In 1835, having extended the apostolate of her new Congregation to a young population with new needs, she officially adapted the formulation of her Fourth Vow. Her times were also characterized by prostitution, and prostitution was still deemed *the sin* and *the social plague*. Yet, she herself considered more grave the exploitation, physically and socially, of young girls and children, and their promiscuity in the common prisons of the time with adult criminals, robbers, murderers and thieves. These girls and children were the *young delinquents*, the so-called *irredeemables* produced by family breakup.

They were the *lost* in the midst of the chaos of the times, the *strayed* from the fold of God's love, because love had been wanting. In Mary Euphrasia's estimation, to *be lost* meant not to know how precious one is to God. To *be lost* meant to feel unwanted, at odds

with self, with society and with God. It entailed not knowing God's love. It brought a need for healing, for forgiveness, and for reconciliation with love.

There were also many children left without family, abandoned or orphaned on account of the many uprisings and minor revolutions which characterized those decades. At least 55% of the delinquent youth and socially needy of the times died of want or of ill-treatment (1). Our Foundress did not hesitate to open her arms to them.

In her conferences on our vocation, Mary Euphrasia also reminds us of Pope Gregory XVI's addition in his *BRIEF OF ERECTION* of our congregation with a generalate (2), through which he committed our congregation also to the formation and social and religious education of young children exposed to irreligion and exploitation. These Mary Euphrasia called the *lambs* of the flock. She tells us our zeal should reach out to those children whose situations make their lives degrading. She reminds us that a section of our *PRACTICAL RULES* had been written to ensure their education according to their specific needs. She reveals that, while praying before the tomb of the Apostle Peter in Rome, she heard interiorly the Lord saying to her, "*Feed my lambs!*" In a letter to Sister John of the Cross David, Mary Euphrasia declared that the greatest gift the generalate gave us was the possibility of caring for children who were in moral danger.

Mary Euphrasia also draws our attention to the boarders, young people and widows, who received education and shelter from the sisters. This was a practice going back to Father Eudes, whose own niece was a boarder at Caen from her eleventh year of age. In those days parents sought out *holy educators* to form their children's spiritual life, either in a live-in situation or on a visiting, counseling basis. Father Eudes' niece, Sister M. Nativity, who later became a pillar of his Order, and Sister M. Blessed Sacrament Pierre, the first superior of Our Lady of Charity, were highly regarded in this apostolate. Mary Euphrasia herself also carried on a similar work as did Mother Divine Heart Droste-zu-Vischering in Portugal.

In Mary Euphrasia's time, needs being what they were and vocations plentiful, these various groups were served in her foundations around the world. Saint Mary Euphrasia's zeal had great scope, opening our congregation, as she did, to these destitute and helpless persons on a world-wide scale.

Although Mary Euphrasia reached out to all the persons we have

mentioned, she did not abandon the voluntary seeker of conversion and salvation, the *Penitent* in the understood sense of that word. Usually in her houses there was at least one small group of these, being helped by the sisters and in turn helping others.

Our Foundress' teaching to her novices makes clear her personal preferences for the recipients of our Fourth Vow. In 1840 she said,

*It is not just for the wellbeing of young people that we are called. Our zeal must reach out to those souls who without the help we are called to give would perhaps be lost forever. Oh, how we should be concerned for them! We must help them with a zeal and a generosity without limit (3).*

Again,

*Our principal end is charity which leads us to follow Jesus the Good Shepherd, to go in search of the poor sheep who have strayed from His love and have become the refuse of the world...Let us leave the ninety-nine other good works and pursue the care of the lost sheep of the House of Israel be they in Italy, Germany, America or Africa (4) ...Our mission is to receive with open arms the most abandoned souls. There is no misery, no spiritual wound that we ought not to seek to heal with God's grace (5).*

*When the great ones of the earth esteem you and are generous to you, it is on account of your Fourth Vow. In fact, you yourself owe all to our poor girls, for to their salvation you are committed. Your vocation, your habit, nothing is yours. You owe it all to this poor girl for your Congregation exists only for her (6).*

And still another teaching:

*And here, my daughters, I feel it my duty to give you a very important recommendation. You know it is written in the Gospel that the Good Shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep to seek the one that was lost. In like manner let us leave the ninety-nine good works to bring back the lost sheep of the house of Israel. By this I mean that if you cannot establish several classes you should give preference to those for penitents... (7).*

A contemporary study on St. Mary Euphrasia tells us,

*Mother Pelletier occupies a special place among the holy*



*educators of the Nineteenth Century because she was destined by Providence to a special portion of the people of God, and she consecrated herself to them with an inspired preference. She seeks out the lost, and the abandoned, and each one is regained for society in the measure each one is grafted on the Vine and plunged into the Love which saves and vivifies. Any other activity is a complementary one, or a beginning, undertaken in order to go gradually toward the real end of re education, salvation, social redemption (8).*

In practice, salvation according to Mary Euphrasia is both spiritual and social. This above writer adds,

*Conversion and a healthy social life are inseparable to Mother Pelletier. The whole person is her concern. Her genius in the church is to restore, to re educate, to recreate, to save. Her preference is for the most deprived of hope and love, the most suffering, the deviant. For Mother Pelletier, the only real evil is sin, which is a rejection of love, a refusal more or less conscious, more or less willed. It became for her the basis of a gift of self in true liberty, that of the child of God (9).*

In re-reading her Conferences, we too cannot help being impressed by Mary Euphrasia's emphasis on the conversion, salvation, sanctification, re-creation, regeneration aspect of our mission. She continuously employs these terms and other similar ones.

In Mary Euphrasia's country and times, there was a singular fusion of the spiritual and the temporal, the supernatural and the human, the religious and the secular. However, she was very sensitive to the fact that this was not the case all across her world-wide community. After one of her visits abroad she said,

*I have learned more in these visits to our communities abroad, in a time block of three weeks, than I ever learned in ten years remaining here in Angers ... We must be attentive and sensitive to cultures and countries and different needs (10).*

In another conference, she stressed,

*Our congregation is founded to labor not only for the salvation of the souls around us, but also for those who do not know God" (11)*

*"We have those in conflict with the Church to reconcile" (12). This is her call to evangelization. "You can therefore do nothing better than to follow the customs of that country" (13).*

In her own country, due to the spiritual abandonment her young people had suffered on account of conditions after the Revolution, Mary Euphrasia particularly stressed social education and faith formation. Basically, she considered that moral or ethical principles develop normally in a person in the measure that spiritual contact with God through Jesus Good Shepherd is brought about. But it was important that learning about God and spiritual matters be a happy experience.

Mary Euphrasia's philosophy of conversion and of service is based on the dual reality of God's longing on the one hand, and on the person's free movement toward God on the other. She taught a reverential love for persons. This reverential love is expressed in respect for the dignity and worth of each child of God, for each reflects in some way the mystery of God.

Mary Euphrasia teaches that salvation is related to the experience of being loved. The first means aiding in saving souls, therefore, is to love them, to let them experience love, care, concern, to make them happy in God. Once persons have experienced deeply that they are loved, they will be healed and grow and be able to love in return.

Mary Euphrasia's trust in the capacity of persons to change and to turn around their lives was limitless. The major objective of all her programs was an encounter with the Lord in interior freedom and love. However, she never disassociated the human and spiritual and social dimensions. To educate for life here and hereafter was a slow process, a bringing to awareness, a growing, a becoming, which eventually called forth and engaged the collaboration and good will of the person involved.

In an account dated 1844 we read,

*In Mother Pelletier 's homes, the sisters strive to procure their young people's physical well-being, to provide them with an adequate intellectual formation, to help them towards a balanced emotional life. They offer them a deep spiritual life based on truth, through which these distressed ones arrive at an acceptable standard of moral and social virtues. In fact, the sisters' efforts are aimed at creating a whole new inner world for them. Mary Euphra-*

*sia's gift was to individualize and to socialize her programs (14).*

## TODAY

In our 1973 Charism Study, we did some breast-beating, recognizing that "our apostolate for some years became tailored to suit our lifestyle (monastic stability) and to protect ourselves and the persons under our care from the milieu which was judged as evil. Great stress was laid on the spiritual with a largely penitential element. The focus of rehabilitation was personal conversion more than social re-insertion" (15).

It can be concluded that Mary Euphrasia's spirit had become obscured in some way. But this seems to have happened in all institutions and religious families. That is why the Holy Spirit today moves so forcefully in our Congregation. Yet, at present, some believe we have overreacted by allowing professionalism to outweigh the spiritual and religious dimension.

The model which Saint Mary Euphrasia followed and continues to give us today is the gospel image of the Good Shepherd. She tells us that meditation on the Good Shepherd cannot exhaust a lifetime.

*Nothing is more relevant to our Fourth Vow than this gospel message - the Good Shepherd who seeks the suffering and lost, strengthens the weak ones, heals the sick and binds up their wounds, carries in His arms the weak and fallen, feeds them according to their needs. He knows His sheep and calls each one by name. He gives His life for them. His approach and solicitude differ for each one, according to each one's need and situation. (16).*

Mary Euphrasia reminds us of Magdalen, the Samaritan woman, Zacheus, Peter - head of the church, the public prostitute, the erring disciples of Emmaus, whose experience of Jesus she analyzes in detail. Each of these the Good Shepherd touches in a way unique to each. When He finds the lost sheep He carries it on his shoulders.

An interesting witness in the Cause of Canonization was a Contemplative sister who referred an instruction of Mary Euphrasia to her community. Among those touched by conversion by Jesus Good Shepherd was the public prostitute. She did not come to him voluntarily, but was brought by force, against her will. However, after Jesus' dialogue with her, she became a new person, she was converted. She began to love, to hope. Jesus told her to go and sin no

more...His word is efficacious. It will be the same for our young girls brought by authority, against their will. We must give them the chance of an encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd. They too will respond to His love and mercy.

Until the early part of the twentieth century, moral and material needs of the unfortunate were provided for by the religious orders in the Church. Religious were, in the main, providers of services which, in their humanitarian and spiritual sensitivity, equal our highly sophisticated social services of today.

In our own times, services to people have gradually been taken over by governmental agencies and are legislated for in detail in most countries. Legislation ordinarily results in some kind of funding. It also establishes norms and criteria, socially beneficial but usually not taking account of the spiritual dimension. At the same time, we can say that between Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia's times, the circle of those readily pinpointed as needing salvation had widened. Today the circle of those needing salvation through our Fourth Vow, the spiritually and socially destitute, has broadened even more. The externally Christian atmosphere of the nineteenth century has all but disappeared. Moral values are changing; a sense of sin and its effects is unknown to many. We have family disintegration, moral disintegration all around us.

Our 1979 General Chapter discerned about this. The capitulars asked where the Holy Spirit might be leading our world-wide community. The Chapter concluded that we still regard as necessary an encounter of human compassion and divine mercy. Our Fourth Vow, our mission at this time, is directed toward the rejected, those most afflicted with human weakness, those wounded because of sin and the consequences of sin: individuals, families, society; and we continue to have a particular concern for children, girls and women. Our 1985 Constitutions continue to endorse this vision of our mission.

This last point takes us back to our 1973 Charism Study. This study emphasized that girls and women are still the most vulnerable today, humanly, socially, and spiritually. At the same time, woman has a special role in humanity (17). Sociologists also tell us that the role of woman so pervades history that an era can be defined by the way its women live the values that particular age endorses.

Pope John Paul II, in speaking in our country about Mary, said that in the end, woman will dominate history. In Mary's vocation is

contained the vocation of all women, even those in deep misery and degradation.

A sign of our times seems to be that we reach out to woman, as far as possible, in and through her natural environment. There we can more easily touch her in her God-given nature, in her self-giving dedication and generosity, and natural compassion. And in this way we affect her whole environment. In fact our 1985 Constitutions consider this mode effective for all those we serve (18).

At the same time the study on the *ORIGINAL CHARISM OF SAINT JOHN EUDES*, for the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity and the Good Shepherd (see addendum), emphasized that young children, young boys as well as girls, are as wounded and helpless in our society as are women and girls. The moral distress of these boys is equal to that of their sisters.

Concerning the institutional or residential approach, in Mary Euphrasia's time, 50% of women were illiterate. A girl's education could probably only be assured in a residential setting, as Mary Euphrasia herself experienced. Monasteries provided education for young boys, even as today the wealthy frequent boarding schools. Therefore, for Mary Euphrasia's young people it was not degrading to be educated in an institution, but on the contrary it was the best thing that could happen to them. And, serving as she did especially the outcast, the abandoned, the homeless, the institutional setting was the best and probably the only way of providing their basic human needs. Withal there was a family spirit, and her houses were called "home." There was love too, and many people concerned about one another.

Today in our world we have seen changes in approach in all sectors of life, family life included. Therefore, there are many changes taking place in types of service such as ours.

There is also a change in attitudes toward and acceptance of human weakness. Society is more tolerant because more vulnerable and more aware of its vulnerability. Today it is not such a great thing to understand, to compassionate human weakness and human misery. This was not so in Mary Euphrasia's time either in Church circles or in the civil world.

Further, the Charism Study on St. John Eudes, referred to above, states that sexual mores are now seen in relation to other components of our pattern of living; that is, we relate to multiple

aspects of our culture rather than focus on one only. Another phenomenon is that social justice and a moving toward solidarity with other nations and peoples is gradually broadening our vision and hearts. We realize that what threatens the people of one country threatens the whole world. All this, the Study continues, leads us to discern a certain broadening of the concern which moved Saint John Eudes in the seventeenth century towards the distress of women and young girls. Consequently, it seems that, although special attention to women in difficulty remains an aspect of our charism since a particular exploitation of womanhood still prevails, the focus is less restricted now, less dominant, less exclusive than it was in the seventeenth century.

It is with a sense of the movement of history and in this climate of openness to the times that we will need to discern where the Spirit is moving us today. Mary Euphrasia's gift of universal zeal, which stimulated her to reach out to as many as possible, is our gift too. And this gift will help us discern upon whom we should focus our meager human resources.

Our Fourth Vow does not specify the manner in which or vehicle by which we offer our services. According to Mary Euphrasia's teaching and spirit and according to our constitutions, we serve in whatever form is most suited to a person's need, most helpful toward alleviating the inner conflict and pain being experienced. Our congregation had recognized that there are different ways of expressing our Fourth Vow through "*multi-faceted services*," but always as helping the "*unloved become beloved*." We see our ministry as approaching, by preference, persons in need of forgiveness and inner healing, and in the manner and with the attitudes of Jesus (19).

Cardinal E. Pironio who was present at our general chapter of 1979 gave us a comprehensive objective analysis of our mission through our Fourth Vow:

*I repeat this definition of your mission which concerns your charism and your spirituality. You, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, have been called, consecrated, and sent to reveal and to communicate to the world of today the merciful love of the Father revealed in Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd.*

*It is not just revealing the love of God... but the love of God which seeks, forgives, comforts, converts, saves. You*

*are Sisters of the Good Shepherd, signs of the merciful love of the Father.*

We conclude therefore that we can exercise our Fourth Vow of Zeal in many ways. Some of these may be:

- through a simple human relationship of compassionate concern
- through zealous prayer or sacrifice
  
- through a loving, understanding service
  
- through our work, whatever it may be, but offered as part of vowed zeal.
  
- through a complex network of professional services, residential or non-residential
  
- through an insertion in diocesan efforts, in line with our charism
  
- through evangelization, especially directed to those in need of reconciliation

## **CONCLUSION**

All of this underscores the need for discernment on local levels, cultural levels, the Church level, where we are. What is important is awareness of our gift in our Fourth Vow and an awareness that we both give and receive. For, in order to be effective in the exercise of our Fourth Vow, the zeal of compassion and mercy must meet in us in order to reach out and make of any human service a touch of God, an encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd. This is precisely the *apostolate proper to our Congregation*, the mission to which *we are sent* by the Church.

ADDENDUM  
*EXTRACT FROM THE "STUDY ON THE CHARISM  
OF SAINT JOHN EUDES "*

*CONCLUSION:*

- A: A merciful concern for people in moral distress or danger is, of course, for all times.
- B: A preferential attention to the problems of women and of girls in difficulty - because they are generally the object of another's pleasure and exploitation - seems to be for all times.

However, in this regard, there are three situations of our times that we need to take into account:

- 1) The changed attitude toward sexual sins
- 2) The greater attention given today to the total situation of each person
- 3) The fact that a similar distress is being inflicted on young boys

In regard to 1):

Sexual disorders were seen in the 17th Century as THE crime and sin of the century. Therefore women who were at the same time the agent and the victim, became the outcasts of society. In the more fortunate cases, they became the objects of special concern.

Today, instead, these disorders are seen as one among many other disorders. Particular attention, in fact, is given to the fundamental disorder of division in humanity through social injustice and the suppression of human beings by economic pressures.

There is, therefore, in our times, a certain levelling of sexual problems with other problems, and consequently the same levelling of a special concern for women.

In regard to 2):

Today, there is a tendency to evaluate all problems of all persons -be they sexual or not - within the context of the psychological and sociological (developmental) environment of the person. This tends to influence the sexual and specifically feminine aspect of the "sentiment of compassion" which characterizes the CHARISM of Our Lady of Charity.



In regard to 3):

We can say that today the majority of human beings are uprooted and defenseless in the face of organized and complex forces which are out of their control. This is a general situation, regardless of the sex of the person.

In particular, many adolescent boys in our cities and industrial centers are deeply disoriented, and from certain aspects their moral distress is equal to that of their sisters.

Therefore, we can discern a certain broadening of, and a relation to, the concern which moved Saint John Eudes in the 17th Century to respond to the distress of women and young girls.

In conclusion, it seems that special attention to women in difficulty remains an ASPECT of the CHARISM of Our Lady of Charity, since a particular exploitation of womanhood still prevails; however, the focus is less restricted, less dominant, less exclusive than it was in the 17th Century (20).

### *REFLECTION GUIDE*

I am a Sister of the Good Shepherd. I have been called by God, consecrated by the Holy Spirit, and sent by the Church through my Congregation, to REVEAL AND TO COMMUNICATE to the world of TODAY the merciful LOVE of the Father, revealed in Christ Jesus the Good Shepherd.

This is not revealing simply the love of God...but the love of God which seeks, forgives, comforts, saves. I am to be a sign of the *merciful love* of the Father.

1. When have I felt myself most authentically a Sister of the Good Shepherd?
2. What was I BEING/DOING that made me feel so authentically a Good Shepherd sister?

## Chapter Five

### ***MYSTICAL/ASCETICAL IMPLICATIONS***

*Just think how sublime is the sacrifice we have made by our consecration through our Fourth Vow to labor for the salvation of souls! This sacrifice raises us to the dignity of cooperators in God's own activity of mercy.*

*In many religious orders, one makes only the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. But for us, these three vows are, as it were, the means of arriving at our end; that is, the accomplishment of our Fourth Vow by which we consecrate ourselves to the salvation of our neighbor.*

*This vow requires us to live in so great an authenticity that by the witness of our own virtue, we may draw forth the innate splendor of the souls we guide.*

*Let us refer all we do to our Fourth Vow. It is this vow that carries us, keeps us, guides us, and that gives redemptive value even to our smallest actions (1).*

#### **A SPIRITUAL POWER**

This teaching of Saint Mary Euphrasia introduces us to the mystical power of our Fourth Vow which, with God's grace and through our cooperation, becomes effective in our lives and mission. For, our call to mission in our Congregation of the Good Shepherd is also a call and an empowering to growth in wholeness and in

holiness. Formerly the expression for this was, "*tending to the perfection of love.*"

St. Mary Euphrasia continuously stimulated her sisters to growth in the "*perfection of love*" which we call wholeness, holiness, sainthood. We read in her conferences:

*Our little congregation which has just come into existence, since it has been founded scarcely thirty years, nevertheless counts, I hope, many of its members among the elect. Yes, we have seen saints among the professed, saints among the novices, saints also among the postulants ...*(2). *Religious communities are those who ought to be most fruitful in souls illustrious for sanctity. And I have the sweet hope that you will become many saints by living your Rule faithfully, in order that you may attain the end of your vocation* (3).

That our Fourth Vow is potentially a means of wholeness and holiness was assured us by the Holy Spirit through the Church in 1666, and even more dramatically in 1835. More recently, Pope Paul VI, in his *EXHORTATION TO RELIGIOUS*, declared that a fervent response to charism, in fidelity to its basic exigencies, is the touchstone of our authenticity (4). Authenticity means holiness, wholeness, sainthood |

The gifts and charisms of the Spirit which our Fourth Vow enshrines possess this power. For, the gifts of zeal, compassion and sharing in God's own activity of mercy are the basis of our Fourth Vow. These the Holy Spirit has lavished on our religious family for our unique mission. They form the characteristic spiritual and human personality of our Congregation of the Good Shepherd.

We will now look more closely at Mary Euphrasia's teaching in this regard. To her novices, from 1835 to 1855, she emphasized that our Fourth Vow is our part of the covenant with the Lord, but further, and even more importantly, it is a marvelous gift. It has power to transform us interiorly. It has power to imbue our prayer, our works, and all our actions with holy zeal for God's glory. Through it we are daily called to a deeper personal conversion and to an ongoing growth in zeal, compassion and mercy. Through it we are stimulated to greater unity in charity with our sisters in community. Through it we are called to a zealous spending of self for others in Christ's name (5).

Saint Mary Euphrasia's teaching and example are the basis of a vigorous and original spirituality and asceticism. For the gifts related to our Fourth Vow give birth to a spirituality which is an ongoing asceticism of *becoming*, a process of *becoming* which leads us to interiorize attitudes and values until they become part of our very person. These attitudes and values bear on the way we relate to others, the way we evaluate others, the way we approach others. They influence the ways we deal with and judge the importance of daily events; and, of course, the way we relate to God in a process ever broadened by the Spirit in prayer and faith experiences.

This process of becoming, says Mary Euphrasia, is a lifetime project, a lifetime career. As we grow into it, our life becomes simplified in a unique understanding and love of Jesus which we express through charity for our brothers and sisters.

Our charity toward others is enlivened and fortified by the strong bond of our vows which unite us to Christ Jesus in the desire to draw all to His love. Through these vows we adhere to Him and are enabled to encircle the world of souls with His very zeal and mercy. As we trust in His Providence for our personal spiritual and temporal needs, His concerns for those estranged from Him become our concerns and open us to a readiness and availability in the work of their salvation.

Gradually, our many efforts and activities are transformed into greater simplicity and unity in love. Mary Euphrasia tells us, "*Do all for love...Do as I did...! only loved...but I loved passionately...* Gradually our lives become simplified in unity and in singleness of purpose.

This is what happened to Mary Euphrasia. We learn from the Process of canonization that she unified in her life the two great commandments and that her life and her mission became one.

In the following pages we will look at the two gifts of zeal and mercy, which characterize our charism and which have power to unify our lives. Being gifts of the Holy Spirit, they bring with them a cluster of other gifts.

### *GIFT OF ZEAL*

Zeal, in the scriptural sense, is by nature God-like, inspired by His love. Our zeal is a reflection of God's zeal for His glory (6).

It seems that *Zeal* like *Charism*, is a term rather difficult to

define. We ourselves have probably experienced zeal in our hearts, both its anguish and its empowering, without being able to put it into words. The dictionary defines *Zeal* as a great ardor, a great earnestness, an intensity in a cause or in promoting some end. Cardinal Danelieu defines apostolic zeal as a painful awareness of the fact that Christ is not known and loved, coupled with the inner urge to do something about it.

In one of our ancient books we read:

*Zeal is the fruit of love, love's very self expression, perfect love. It is a lively and continuous impulse, a violent transport of the heart towards God whom it desires everyone to love, willingly exposing itself to undertake and endure everything for this end (7),*

One of our modern mystics, Thomas Merton, sums it up neatly when he says that apostolic zeal absorbs the whole person, with all the powers at disposal, in every act, and at every moment, tending as far as possible with grace, to what is for God's glory in His creatures.

It seems to me therefore, that *Zeal* has the hallmarks of a charism of the Spirit, the Spirit of *Zeal* who led Jesus to endure even death for the glory of the Father and for love of us. And when this zeal is universal like that of Jesus, all-embracing like His, as it was in Saint Mary Euphrasia, it is like Mercy which is a special *quality* of love. Zeal is a special *intensity* of the same love.

Saint Mary Euphrasia's zeal was inflamed while contemplating the Blessed Trinity, source of all apostolic zeal (8). Hers was not just a passing enthusiasm. It was a continuous, powerful impulse and an empowering to work for God's glory in His suffering ones. Only this zeal could have kept her going until her last breath in joyful, ever ready, gracious, tender and kind service for people. And this throughout the most cruel obstacles and frustrations, day after day, all her life.

Zeal is love in action, passionate love, says Mary Euphrasia. Zeal is the heart of our vocation for our Fourth Vow is the essence of our vocation (9). Our whole life should be lived zealously, earnestly aware of what we are about. Whether we work, pray, suffer, have success or failure, trials or joys, all can relate to zeal.

The gift of zeal is effective in our own hearts, first of all, because

zeal enlightens us concerning ourselves. Zeal brings self-knowledge in the presence of the Lord Jesus, in awareness of His love and in intimate understanding of our human condition and personal sinfulness. Humility, says Mary Euphrasia, is the truth about God and about self, the truth that makes us free.

Consequently, zeal is directed toward establishing us in compunction, compassion, and a longing to bring all to experience God's love (10).

Secondly, zeal becomes an interior force which takes us out of ourselves. It impels us on for the well-being of others, for zeal denotes a certain interior, holy anguish which urges to action.

In the third place, zeal keeps before our mind and heart our call and mission in a singleness of purpose which can lead us straight to our goal: God and souls.

Mary Euphrasia teaches that zeal becomes real in and through intimacy with Christ. Through contemplation on scripture, an intense prayer life, and a deep experience of Eucharist, our zeal gradually becomes His zeal. Participating in His burning zeal for the Father's glory in souls estranged from Him, we cannot but grow in the gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and a right appreciation of the value He sets on souls. This appreciation brings to us a reverential love for persons, as expressions of the power and love of our Creator, and appreciation of the dignity of the child of God redeemed by Christ, a special insight into each person's particular needs.

Realizing that our Fourth Vow gives us the privilege of mediating this merciful love to others, we proceed humbly and graciously, aware that we too bask in the light and love of God's mercy coming to us through the cross of Jesus; we too are "*sheep*."

Participating in Jesus' zeal will make possible for us a process of reducing our self-seeking, a process which we call asceticism. Mary Euphrasia lived asceticism quite naturally. For, zeal exacts a self-transcendence if it is to aid others to relate to God.

Zeal is a stirring of love. Mary Euphrasia tells us that zeal is not passing emotion; it must become an attitude, a way of life for us. For, our Fourth Vow demands courage, dedication and generosity in fidelity to God's plan of salvation for ourselves and for "those who were ours before we knew them." We must make it a way of life.

Zeal generates within us a holy anguish, but it also infuses joy. One of the paradoxes of the spiritual life is the co-experience of anguish or pain with joy. Mary Euphrasia had a full measure of anguish, but no one was more full of joy and peace. These she radiated to all around her, as we learn from the Process.

And she teaches, "live joyfully with your God...rejoice every day...live joyfully, for the tenderness of God is yours" (11).

Yes, the gift of zeal brings with it a cluster of other gifts. St. Paul wrote to Timothy that he should fan into flame God's gift (12). That is what we should do, by making acts of love, by acting lovingly, for all other graces follow as love's escort. Zeal is love in action.

Much more could be said about zeal. Mary Euphrasia speaks of it all through her conferences and letters. I will add just one more reflection: *Zeal* is love in action; it is active love. Compassion, *mercy*, is love in its most tender, most generous, most reverent, most oblation, most self-giving, most risking form. But it is love. Zeal and mercy are love.

### MERCY AND COMPASSION

When we reflect on either zeal or mercy we are in the sublime realms of charity and of special gifts of the Spirit. Charismatic gifts are often based on natural gifts. At times though there seems to be no relationship between a charism and a person's natural ability. But in either case, the charism touches and empowers the human will in a way which leads the person in a special direction, according to God's desires.

*Charism* is difficult to define, but we can think of a charism as a particular aspect of Jesus which the Holy Spirit intends to emphasize; that is, a "*new face of God*" revealed through Jesus. For, Jesus always reveals the Father.

When she identifies her charism as a sharing in the mission of Jesus Good Shepherd, Mary Euphrasia intuits that it is a special awareness of God's tender love in His mercy. Theologians tell us that "mercy is the love of God which is active in our salvation history" (13). "It is the love which seeks, forgives, heals, converts, saves. It is a charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit" (14).

This gift of mercy in reality orientates and defines our zeal, zeal for the salvation of souls, or, as Mary Euphrasia states, zeal for the

glory of God in the salvation of souls. In defining from a practical point of view her vision of our charism, Mary Euphrasia taught:

*Nothing is more relevant to our vocation than this gospel of the Good Shepherd. Jesus the Good Shepherd is our model We must shape ourselves in His image and live His very life... We will grasp the meaning of our calling in the measure that we put on His thoughts, His feelings, His affections, until we become His living reflections (15).*

Mary Euphrasia ponders much and meditates long on Jesus Good Shepherd. Her spiritual director of the last seven years of her life, Father Marius Le Roux, testified that she lived zeal and compassion to such a degree that in a sense she became transformed into Jesus. He lived His mystery in her. His unconditional, all embracing and deeply personal love was reflected through her. Through the Eucharist Jesus taught and transformed her, for He was her food, her source of life and vitality, the light of her eyes (16).

We too can be brought to this point by our Fourth Vow.

Mary Euphrasia also shares her insights through her teaching. In her times emphasis was on the judgments of God rather than on His mercy. The judges in her cause for canonization declared, *"Oh, how much our world needs the loving mercy of God which Mary Euphrasia shows us, for we have been fed only on His wrath" (17).*

In our day we are more attuned to the reality of His compassionate love, helped by those who have emphasized and lived compassion. Jesus continues to speak to us through persons of our own day. And spiritual writers of our times emphasize the importance of compassion and mercy. However, Mary Euphrasia sums it all up neatly when she says that we find our asceticism, our part of the covenant, in Jesus the Good Shepherd, in His humanity. Jesus shows us a new *face of God*, His mercy in human form. His compassion for His brothers and sisters led even to giving His life.

Saint Mary Euphrasia tells us that mercy and compassion are disinterested love which continue to give cordially and generously of self even in the face of rejection, non-return, and ingratitude. The highest form of mercy is unconditional and total forgiveness.

Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *RICH IN MERCY* speaks like our Foundress. Mercy, he writes, equalizes, raises up, causes harmony, reconciles, puts things right. Mercy is that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and evil. Mercy lifts us



up when we fall and frees us from our greatest threats. It is the Eucharist, he adds, that brings us ever nearer to that love which is more powerful than death. The Pope points to the story of the prodigal son in Luke's gospel as Jesus' most vivid portrait of the Father's compassion toward us.

Archbishop Martinez in his book *THE SANCTIFIER* writes,

*There is human and divine justice, but there is only one mercy, the divine mercy, which, by imitation, is reflected through us...Mercy is something celestial divine, that Jesus brought from the bosom of the Father. Whoever does a work of mercy accomplishes a work which is not of earth. It is in the divine horizons of mercy that the active life attains its consummation (18).*

Father Matthew Fox in his book on *COMPASSION*, explains that human compassion is a feeling of kinship, a forgetting of self, of personal problems and difficulties, to remember what makes another's suffering ours. It is loving God through our relieving of pain in others, through our peace-making, through our reconciling. Compassion is to love neighbor as oneself.

He continues, compassion is the spirituality of adults, a spirituality of love, of justice, of maturity, a willingness to risk. ...Compassion is reverence, respect, humility. Compassion is the fullest experience of the spiritual life.

Finally, I will quote an insight from a purely human point of view. Arthur Gersild in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADOLESCENCE*, writes,

*Compassion is the ultimate and most meaningful embodiment of emotional maturity. It is through compassion that a person achieves the highest peak and the deepest reach in his or her search for self-fulfilment (19).*

Compassion in its human fullness, and mercy in its spiritual plenitude, is love at its deepest experience, at its highest peak, at its most generous outpouring of self.

Love by its very nature must communicate itself. And merciful love must reach out and touch and fill and draw to itself in happiness and joy, until all the emptiness caused by hate and the absence of love are filled to overflowing. This happens in each one of us and through us in others.

Therefore, the gifts we ourselves receive through our Fourth Vow, like seeds, need to be cultivated in contemplation and lived out in asceticism. In this way, wounded as we are, we can be instruments to bring forth fruits of conversion, of salvation, of sanctification. In this way our brokenness is empowered to call forth the innate splendor of the child of God in those we serve.

### THROUGH THE CROSS

Mary Euphrasia reminds us that both mercy and zeal come to us through the cross of Christ. "*Authentic zeal*" she says, "*can only be kindled with the wood of the cross.*" Therefore the cross is implicit in our Fourth Vow as are mercy and zeal. We have committed ourselves to follow Jesus the Good Shepherd, who for love gave His life on the cross. On the cross Jesus is fully Good Shepherd. And it is in contemplating Jesus on the cross that we experience something of His total gift to the Father and His self-gift to us.

In her practical way, Mary Euphrasia teaches that it is in our daily cross that we experience what the total gift of self means. What is a cross in her estimation? Whatever contradicts our hope and aspirations in living our Fourth Vow. She tells us to expect this in our mission. It will come from ourselves, from others we are trying to help, from good people, from our sisters, from God Himself. We should look at it, accept it, offer it up in love, focus on love, and then continue on. It is thus that we share in His Paschal Mystery, in surrender to the Father's will in peace and joy. Mary Euphrasia tells us that, in our life of solicitude and of labor for souls, Jesus is, as it were, on the cross in our person. The cross is our pledge of hope.

In our Charism Study, we realized:

*We have a new awareness of ourselves in our identity through our Fourth Vow. We recognize it as a gift of the Holy Spirit, a strength, a dynamism, a life, a love within us. We have come to realize we must be willing to pay the price of our charism through the cross, through suffering, failure, death to self, insecurity, change, through our own paschal mystery. We have experienced our own need of healing; therefore, we are gaining a more mature self-image. We recognize that our zeal and mercy must be active above all in our communities, effectively reconciling us in our differences, enabling us to discover together the love of Christ which called us and keeps us together (20).*

## CONCLUSION

Our covenant is personal: we are called by name. As Pope John Paul II so aptly expressed it:

*When Christ looked upon you and loved you and called you, that redeeming love of His was directed toward your particular person, and at the same time it took on a spousal character: it became a love of choice. This love embraces your whole person, soul and body... in your unique and unrepeatable personal 'I' (21).*

But, to our wonder, we are a chosen people, a community united in faith by the same spiritual gifts and mission (22).

Therefore, the implications of the asceticism and mysticism connected with our Fourth Vow are not only personal but communal. We know that it is only through our gradual personal and communal transformation that the love of God can flow through us to others, be they our sisters in religion, our brothers and sisters in God, or those who *"were ours before we even knew them."*

Mary Euphrasia tells us that merciful love came to us in human form from Mary through the Holy Spirit. Mary's role in our salvation history is ongoing and indispensable in our Good Shepherd mission. As long as we are united with Jesus in His redemptive mission, Mary will share her zeal and compassion with us.

And I close with a last teaching of Mary Euphrasia. I paraphrase:

The call to follow Christ will always be a glorious mystery. To be called to live in union with Jesus the Good Shepherd in so precise a manner, in His redemptive mission, to share in His human and divine fullness of compassion and mercy, is a most sublime mystery and a glorious challenge. We will grasp its wonder only in heaven. It is a gift we must often ponder, and for which we will be eternally grateful.

## REFLECTION GUIDE

"The great mystery of the Incarnation took place when Mary pronounced her *FIAT*. Likewise, our Congregation was born when Mary Euphrasia repeated the *FIA T* of Mary"(23).

1. Is Mary Euphrasia reminding us that only our renewed active *FIAT* to our wonderful GIFTS, with all they entail of joyful dedication and generous sacrifice, will revitalize our congregation at this time of our history?

Take a mind-trip to your *daily* scene of living: community...work...occupation...prayer...leisure...etc...Make a memory note of at least three places where you can live more earnestly the GIFTS and CHARISMS of your CALL and MISSION.

1. What am I going to do about these points? Make a written note of them.
2. What is the Spirit saying to me in my heart?

"Live joyfully with your God! Let Him be your soul's atmosphere!"

1. What does this say to me about where *prayer* is in my life?

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOURTH VOW - prior to 1789  
Father John Eudes---(1601-1680)  
*"Our spirit, my dear daughters, is zeal  
for the salvation of souls. "*

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Preaching	1628	Father Eudes was sent to preach by his superiors at the Oratory. He preached missions until his death. Not his primary vocation.
	1635	Women touched by grace requested his help. A keenly felt need.
	1638 - 1640	Many conversions.
Refuge	1640	Father Eudes with pious women provide a shelter for penitents.
	1641	Public remonstrances by Madeleine Lamy, his pious helper.
Charism	1641	Father Eudes is granted a "look of mercy," compassionate love for the penitents. An inner urge to act. "I feel God is inspiring me to do something for these penitents."
"Little House of Charity"	1641	December 8: "Deo Gratias!" The bishop erects a Pious Union under the Rule of St. Augustine.
	1642	Margaret Morin, directress, disappointed and angry, leaves. So does Madeleine Lamy.
Inspiration of Fourth Vow	1644	Father Eudes ponders a Religious Order of women and a Fourth Vow.
	1644	The Visitation Nuns cooperate with him. Father Eudes begins working on preliminary Constitutions with Mother Patin.
	1647	Mother Patin returns to the Visitation. The best candidates go with her!

Fourth Vow: Stability Status Grace	1651	The bishop erects a diocesan Fourth Vow for ministry to penitent women. Mother Patin returns to Our Lady of Charity.
	1652	June 2, the first sisters over twenty-one years of age pronounce their vows including the Fourth Vow, as members of a diocesan congregation.
	1666	Jan. 2, Decree of Pope Alexander VII approving Order of Our Lady of Charity.
	1668	Death of Mother Patin. A superior is elected from the Community of Our Lady of Charity, Mother Mary Blessed Sacrament Pierre:
	1679	Father Eudes revises his Constitutions.
	1680	Death of Father John Eudes.
	1704	Our Lady of Charity begins receiving girls and women placed by competent authority. No change however in the formula of the Fourth Vow.
	1714	Our Lady of Charity at Caen founds a Community at Tours.
	1741	Benedict XIV approves the 1679 Constitutions of Father Eudes. They are printed.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOURTH VOW - after 1789

Mother Euphrasia Pelletier---(1796-1868)

*"The Glory of God and the Salvation of souls, this is my life!"*

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French Revolution	1789-1793 1796	Historical beginning of 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Birth of Rose-Virginie at Noirmoutier where her family had been deported, Feb.11, 1794
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“To save souls”	1814	Rose-Virginie has a spiritual experience of zeal for souls, at Christian Association, Tours. She enters Our Lady of Charity at Tours on October 20.
“Vowed to Christ”	1817	Solemn Profession September 9. Formula of Fourth Vow restricted to serving voluntary penitents. Implementation: also girls and women brought by competent authority. Boarders.
House of St Magdalen	1825	Nov. 11, Mother Euphrasia founds the Community of Sisters of St. Magdalen at Tours.
Angers	1829	July 31, founds Our Lady of Charity at Angers under the title "Good Shepherd."
Inspiration of Generalate	1831	"I will never forget that moment." "I had an interior certitude" about it.
Zeal	1831	May 21, Superior at Angers. "Zeal devours me."
House of St Magdalen	1831	Founds the Community of Sisters of St. Magdalen at Angers.
	1833	The Bishop of Angers, Sept. 26, approves a local generalate and petitions Rome to establish the Generalate officially.
“To incarnate Merciful Love”	1833	Sister Mary Euphrasia is officially elected General. The Community adopts the title of "Good Shepherd" definitively.
Foundations	1833	Le Mans, Poitiers, Grenoble. "Our zeal must embrace the world!"
	1834	Mary Euphrasia writes to Cardinal Odescalchi, the Pope's Vicar at Rome. Her <i>Fiat</i> .
Generalate OLCGS	1835	Jan. 9, Decree of Rome approving Our Lady of Charity of Good Shepherd, a new Congregation in the Church. January 14, Decree approved by Pope.

	1835	April 3, Apostolic Brief of Gregory XVI confirming and promulgating the erection of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in a centralized administration, the Generalate.
Fourth Vow	1836	Revised Constitutions. Fourth Vow for voluntary penitents and those placed by competent authority. New order of government-roles, Formation, etc. New spirit.
Provinces	1855	Erection of Provinces, July 21.
	1868	April 24-death of Mother Mary Euphrasia Pelletier.
Fourth Vow modified	1899	Revision of Constitutions to accomodate Provinces. Fourth Vow: "To labor for the salvation of souls of persons who enter our houses."
	1925	Revision of Constitutions in accordance with Canon Law. Fourth Vow similar to 1899 edition.
Vow of Zeal	1955	New Constitutions. Fourth Vow: "To labor for the salvation of souls in the apostolate proper to our Congregation." Vow of Zeal
Vow of Zeal	1969	Interim Constitutions. Vow of Zeal similar to 1955 edition.
Vow of Zeal	1985	"Also, I vow zeal committing myself to live and work for the salvation of souls, especially those to whom I am sent."



## WORDING OF OUR FOURTH VOW THROUGH HISTORY

- 1666: "...to *dedicate* myself to the instruction of penitent girls and women, who having lived licentiously, will put themselves voluntarily and without constraint under the direction of the religious of this monastery to be converted to God and to do penance."
- 1836: "...to *employ* myself in the instruction of the penitent girls and women who submit themselves voluntarily, or shall be forced by legitimate and competent authority to submit themselves to the guidance of the religious of this congregation to be converted and to do penance."
- 1899: "...to *labor* for the salvation of the souls of the persons who enter this house to be converted."
- 1925: "...to *labor* for the salvation of the souls of the persons who enter our houses to be converted and to do penance."
- 1955: .. ...to *labor* for the salvation of souls in the work of the Institute." The Fourth Vow defined "Vow of Zeal" officially.
- 1969: "I likewise vow to *lab or* for the salvation of souls in the apostolate of the Congregation." Vow of Zeal.
- 1985: Constitutions: "Also, I vow zeal, committing myself to *live and work* for the salvation of souls, especially those to whom I am sent."

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AP Apostolic Process for Beatification & Canonization of the Servant of God, Sister Mary of St. Euphrasia, 1897.
- OP Ordinary Process, as above, 1886.
- CONF Pelletier, St. Mary Euphrasia, Conferences & Instructions: Newman Bookshop, Westminster, 1943 edition.
- CS Charism Study, Good Shepherd Congregation, led by the International Commission on the Apostolate, 1974.

- CSJE Study on Charism of St. John Eudes, by Special Commission, 1973-75.
- DC Constitutions General Chapter, 1985.
- ET Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life, June 29, 1971.
- IC Interim Constitutions of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, General Chapter, 1969.
- JN Juridical Norms of the 1969 General Chapter.
- MV Mirror of Virtues, By Mother Augustine of Jesus Concha & Sister Therese Letocart, 1886; English edition 1888.
- OLC Our Lady of Charity in Solitude, Meditations according to the spirit of St. John Eudes, by a Religious of Our Lady of Charity.
- PEZ Pezzoli, Denise, Letters & Conferences of St. Mary Euphrasia, French edition, 1964.
- SC Spirit and Charism of St. Mary Euphrasia, (1979); Regards Neufs, 1976, by Sr. M. Euphrasia Degris, Angers.

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*Dives in Misericordia*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1980.

*Apostolic Exhortation on Religious Life*, Pope John Paul II, 1984.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER ONE

1. CONF pp. 29-30; July 1841
3. OLC p. 161
5. CONF pp. 366 ff
7. PEZ p. 29
9. CONF pp. 228, 229, 271, 287, 341,393,416
11. DC Religious Profession
13. CONF 1840
15. CONF p. 292
17. DC Mission & Spirit
19. CSJE, Manuscript
21. SC pp. 82, 119
23. IN 10
25. CONF Chap. 6, 9, 12
27. MV p. 133
2. DC Religious Profession...
4. CONF pp. 25, 27, 395
6. Cf. CONF pp. 366-383
8. Cf pp. 33, 34, 50, 59, 127, 128, 155, 226, 263, 342, 343, 385, 386, 393, 395, 418
10. IN 25
12. PEZ p. 106 ff
14. DC 1985...
16. CONF Chap. 4 & 6
18. OP I
20. 1641
22. FUTRELL quoted in SC p. 55 24. MT 18: 6, 10
26. CONF p. 386
28. Letter September 1837

### CHAPTER TWO

1. CONF pp. 17, 19
3. ET 11
5. ORIGINS OF OLC
7. Cf DC MISSION & SPIRIT
9. IC 3; DC MISSION & SPIRIT
11. IC 14; DC RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE
13. CONF p. 26
15. CONF pp. 62, 63, 26
17. AP I
19. IC 27; DC APOSTOLIC ZEAL
21. IC 11; DC THE VOWS
23. IC 4
25. CONF p. 416
2. CONF p. 1
4. ET 12
6. IC 4
8. IC 8; DC THE VOWS
10. IC 30; DC APOSTOLIC ZEAL
12. CONF pp. 33, 384
14. CONF p. 45
16. CONF p. 158
18. 1857
20. CONF p. 127
22. CONF pp. 9, 127
24. CONF 1840
26. CONF Chap. I

### CHAPTER THREE

1. Letter to Louisville, November 1842
3. DEUT; 30, 19; CONF p. 282
5. IC 27; DC LIFE IN COMMUNITY
7. OLC p. 13
9. OLC p. 157
11. OLC p. 150
13. IC 11; DC LIFE IN COMMUNITY
15. CONF p. 255
17. IC 37; DC LIFE IN COMMUNITY
2. CONF pp. 26, 36
4. IC 27; DC APOSTOLIC ZEAL
6. CONF p. 34
8. OLC p. 148
10. CONF p. 386
12. CONF p. 145
14. IC 35; DC LIFE IN COMMUNITY
16. Diary of Sister M. Angels, Manuscript
18. IC 38; DC LIFE IN COMMUNITY

CHAPTER THREE continued

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 19. IC 42; CONF p. 33         | 20. IC 46                 |
| 21. CONF pp. 47-48            | 22. CONF p. 221           |
| 23. CONF p. 224               | 24. CONF p. 313           |
| 25. CONF p. 314               | 26. IBID., p. 343         |
| 27. IBID., Chapters 4 & 62    | 28. IC 49; DC FORMATION   |
| 29. IC 55                     | 30. IC 56; DC FORMATION   |
| 31. IC 8; DC MISSION & SPIRIT | 32. IC 61; DC GOVERNMENT  |
| 33. IC 111, 117               | 34. IC 141; DC GOVERNMENT |
| 35. CONF p. 55                | 36. CONF p. 148           |
| 37. ET 12                     | 38. ET 12                 |
| 39. CONF p. 246               | 40. CONF p. 209           |
| 41. CONF p. 394               | 42. CONF p. 211           |

CHAPTER FOUR

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| 1. PEZ p. 28                   | 2. January 9, 1835; April 3, 1835       |
| 3. CONF p. 155                 | 4. CONF pp. 48, 1840                    |
| 5. CONF p. 36                  | 6. CONF Dec. 1844                       |
| 7. CONF p. 48                  | 8. PEZ p. 29                            |
| 9. PEZ pp. 9, 29               | 10. CONF p. 212                         |
| 11. CONF p. 5                  | 12. CONF p. 54                          |
| 13. Letter of 1841             | 14. Quoted by PEZ p. 31                 |
| 15. CS p. 6                    | 16. CONF 1840                           |
| 17. VATICAN 11 Closure Address | 18. Cf MISSION AND SPIRIT               |
| 19. CS p. 3                    | 20. Extract from Manuscript<br>of Study |

CHAPTER FIVE

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|--|--------------------------|
| 1. CONF 1840, pp 127, 366 3. p. 289                    | 2. p. 228-229 4. ET 12   |
| 5. CONF 1838, 1840                                     | 6. IS 30: 27-28 8. MV 30 |
| 7. OLC p. 154  | 10. CONF p. 297          |
| 9. CONF p. 396; IC 31                                  | 12. 11 Tim. 1:6          |
| 11. CONF p. 138  | 14. SC 55                |
| 13. SC 55  | 16. OP p. 984            |
| 15. CONF pp. 39-41; 42-43                              | 18. pp. 290-291          |
| 17. Report on Process,<br>Manuscript                   | 20. CS Manuscript        |
| 19. p. 201   | 22. CONF p. 282          |
| 21. APOSTOLIC EXHORTA-<br>TION ON RELIGIOUS LIFE, 1984 | 24. MV p. 80             |
| 23. MV p. 80   |                          |

\*\*\* DC always refers to manuscript of 1985 Constitutions

*STUDIES ON GOOD SHEPHERD HERITAGE*

*PART TWO*

*THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE  
CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SISTERS  
OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD  
(1641-1985)*

# ***HISTORICAL ITINERARY OF GOOD SHEPHERD CONSTITUTIONS***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Our call to religious life in the Church is motivated by *Charisms* of the Spirit. In Part I we already reflected on our special Good Shepherd Charisms given us by the Spirit for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ, preferentially for the *Lambs and Sheep* in special need of Jesus the Good Shepherd (1).

Although each one of us has received personal charisms from the Spirit, the initial charisms of Good Shepherd came to us as dynamic gifts first conferred to Father Eudes in 1641, discerned and approved by the Church in 1666, and to Rose-Virginie Pelletier in 1814, approved by the Church in 1835.

Down the years our constitutions have not only embodied these charisms, but have offered us a way of life created to facilitate the learning, the development, the empowerment, the living of these charisms.

The persons first favored with these charisms and who were empowered to pass them on to each one of us, are very important channels of grace to us. Therefore the history of our constitutions is bound up somewhat with their personal history and times. Hence, in briefly tracing the historical itinerary of this enfleshment and transmission to us, we will naturally very briefly touch on these persons and their times. The Spirit moved through them and their history just as the Spirit, our soul's abiding guest, moves in our own personal history and the world-wide radius of the history of our Good Shepherd congregation.

## **I      SAINT JOHN EUDES          AND HIS TIMES**

In regard to Father Eudes, Father Le Beurier gives the following description of him:

*He was rather above the middle height; the natural gentleness of his character was depicted in his features; his fiery but modest eye showed at once the keenness of his mind and the calmness of his soul His originally delicate constitution gradually became so strong that he was capable of the most difficult undertakings and the most fatiguing labors; witness his fifty years of missions, some of which lasted two or three months, and during which he preached every day or even two or three times a day. His faith, far more than the natural strength of his mind, supported him in the midst of opposition of all kinds which he had to encounter for at least forty years. He had almost ruined his health in early life by excessive mortification, but happily the danger was perceived before the case became hopeless, and by means of much rest in the first instance and a little care afterwards, he completely recovered his strength. At sixty years of age his fresh and healthy look was that of a man in the prime of his life. It may be remembered that when he was seventy years of age he preached almost every day in the Cathedral of Rennes, during a mission which lasted three months.*

*Msgr. Huet, a friend of Father Eudes, wrote of him: 'His remarkable virtue and ardent piety won my love and admiration. It would be useless for me to praise him. His innumerable labors for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, his pious and useful writings, have made him dear to God and venerable in the Church' (2).*

Born in 1601, the century Daniel Rops calls the "*great century of souls*," John Eudes was, naturally, influenced by his times. This was a century of civil and spiritual renewal and of revival of the faith after the thirty years' "*wars of religion*." Christianity supposedly prevailed. Protestants were tolerated, but a return to a complete Catholic tradition was being stimulated all over France.

Yet, heresy was present, as well as much ignorance, idleness, even corruption and scandal among the clergy. The *ANNALS* of the Eudists state, "*Clergy were dressed like laymen; they entered business, became traveling salesmen, frequented banquets, theatres and vanities of all sorts.*"

At the same time the country was in social and economic crisis, a condition which spanned all of John Eudes' life. The lower classes, exasperated by their poverty and misery, resorted to rebellions and riots. The saint lived through at least four major plagues and famines. The seventeenth century was also called the century of the "*great lock-up*." All who challenged the established order, whether religious, moral, political or familial, were considered marginalized and in need of being incarcerated. General hospitals existed for these marginalized, and people were sent to them by mandate of civil authorities and courts.

Prostitution was considered the greatest sin and social plague of the times. "*Young women had become the playthings of society.*" They too were *locked up* when out of favor with the authorities and military.

A great awakening was taking place in religious life. Monasticism, which had been threatened with dissolution, was again flourishing. Abbesses of women's monasteries had great influence on the renewal taking place. Dominicans and Jesuits once more became active. Among the laity, noble men and women were giving up possessions and rank and joining religious communities. Missionaries were organizing missions of renewal all over the country.

Saint John Eudes played an important part in all this renewal. He



was assigned missions in Normandy, in western France, where he preached one hundred and ten missions lasting approximately seven weeks each. He was counselor and spiritual director to many communities of nuns and their abbesses. He wrote twenty-seven books, which remained in manuscript form until 1890. And, finally, he succeeded, despite tremendous opposition, in opening seminaries for the formation of priests. This he considered the special mission God had called him to fulfill, his charism in the Church. Preaching missions was not his choice. He wrote in his *MEMOIRS* that he did not like to preach, but since God willed it by obedience, *"woe is me if I do not preach the gospel"*

To carry out his special mission to the priesthood, John Eudes founded a congregation without vows: the Congregation of Jesus and Mary; however, he was never to see it approved by the Church because of the strong opposition from his former colleagues of the Oratory. His motto was, *"Serve Christ and His Church all our life, in justice before God. Please God and do His will corde magno et animo volenti!"*

Saint John Eudes was influenced by the currents of spirituality of his time and directly by Berulle, de Condren, Vincent de Paul, Mr. Olier, the Jesuits, his own immediate family and, indirectly, by Francis de Sales (+ 1622).

His spiritual life and teaching were based on Holy Scripture, especially on Saint Paul. He read widely and drew heavily on the Fathers of the Church: Saints Augustine, Cyril, John Chrysostom, Bernard; and the writings of Saints Mechtilde, Gertrude, Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Genoa. He was influenced also by some prominent abbesses of his time, by Marie des Vallee, a much disputed mystic, and by well known Catholic laymen and women, who were his close friends.

Later in life, around 1668, he was drawn in a special way to the biblical expression, *"I will give you a new heart,"* which he interpreted to mean the *Heart of the Son*. From this came his teaching, *"God loves us with a human heart; we can love Him with the heart of God, Jesus Christ."* A second theme was, *"Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart..."* He claimed, *"Mary is the first and most perfect member of the Mystical Body of Christ..."* These themes sum up his thought at that later period of his life.

In this context Saint John Eudes also founded and organized the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. Francis de Sales had earlier tried and failed to initiate an apostolic religious community for women.

Vincent de Paul experimented with the Rules of the Daughters of Charity, but had to compromise and not establish them as religious in order to permit them to minister to the poor. For, women's orders were cloistered, contemplative, monastic.

John Eudes ended by founding a quasi-monastic apostolic order. First known as "*The Little House of Charity*," then "*Our Lady of Refuge*," later "*Our Lady of Charity*," the Order was erected as a Pious Union in 1641 by the Bishop of Bayeaux, Msgr. d'Angennes. On February 8, 1651, Bishop Mole' raised it to a Diocesan Canonical Congregation, and in 1666 Pope Alexander VII erected it as a Pontifical Order (3).



Image of Mary venerated by Saint John Eudes (1601-1680)

## **II HISTORICAL ITINERARY OF THE CONSTITUTIONS OF OUR LADY OF CHARITY**

The *ANNALS* of Our Lady of Charity state that "*without any determined plan John Eudes was led to found the Order of Our Lady of Charity.*" In 1635, while preaching missions in Caen, he "yielded to requests of some women who had been touched by grace. 'He found a home for them with Madeleine Lamy. She was zealous and generous, and when John Eudes would come to visit and encourage them, she would enlighten him on their difficulties and try to convince him to arrange something more permanent. "*Without her open and vivacious remonstrances he probably would never have gone any further*" (4).

Madeleine Lamy's home was soon too small as more women came for help. Friends of John Eudes rented a larger house and furnished it for her. But then Father Eudes found himself in a difficult situation. According to the law of the times, he had to obtain both civil and ecclesiastical approval for the growing community. He proceeded to obtain these from the Bishop of Bayeux, Msgr. d'Angennes, and *letters patent* from the King of Paris through Richelieu. In November, 1642, the *letters patent* from the King arrived, authorizing a community composed of two distinct groups: the sisters with the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE,*' and the Penitents, with their Own rules. From the beginning, and especially after the Bull of Alexander VII of 1666, the community was known as two distinct en-

titles: the *Religious of Our Lady of Charity* and the *House of the Refuge*.

We read in John Eudes' *MEMOIRS*: "At this time God seems to be inspiring me to do something for these Penitents." But what he was doing was not new in the Church. From 1045 to 1592, the Cortezans, as they were called, could find many refuges and organizations all across France, Italy, Spain and Belgium where they could retire to reform their lives and sanctify themselves if they so desired.

In France, in 1272, the *Order of Penitents* was founded by a citizen named Bernard of Marseilles. This became a religious order under the Rule of Saint Augustine, approved by Nicholas III. At the same time another religious order for penitents was also formed under this same rule. In 1294 in Paris, Father Tisserant Cordelier founded the *Penitents of the Magdalen*.

Just prior to Saint John Eudes' time there was an *Order of Penitents* in Nancy with a fourth vow. He may have learned from their experiences, but we do not know whether he ever knew about the fourth vow of this order; he did not mention it in his writings. Most of these religious groups gradually became extinct.

What Father Eudes did do was give the organization he founded a specific spirit, a form which insured its stability and a certain status in civil and church circles.

On November 25, 1641, Madeleine Lamy and her sisters (all called each other *sister* whether penitents or religious) gathered in the new house. Father Eudes celebrated the liturgy and exhorted them to continue in their vocation. He had drawn up a simple rule of life for the penitents, and to the religious he gave the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*. These rules were approved by the Bishop of Bayeux, Msgr. d'Angennes, and went into effect on December 8, 1641. The community then became a Pious Union.

This is an important date to Saint John Eudes. He noted in his *MEMOIRS*, "In the year 1641 God gave me the grace of commencing the establishment of the House of Our Lady of Charity on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the holy Virgin. Deo Gratias!" (5).

Margaret Morin, a convert from Protestantism, was appointed director, and Madeleine Lamy accepted the role of bursar.

Some helpers soon came. Mlle Dieu-Donne stayed but a short period for, as the *ANNALS* report, "*she and Margaret Morin only agreed to disagree on everything.*" M'ne Saint-Andre and John Eudes' niece Marie Herson (only eleven years old) came, as well as Mlle de Tailleffer, "*filled with an ardent desire to serve God and save souls.*" These last two were the only ones to remain. Madeleine Lamy and Margaret Morin had abandoned Father Eudes' project because they wanted the stability of religious life and he had been slow in moving in that direction.

In 1644, the Visitation nuns agreed to send two sisters to take up the government of the community. The bishop was fearful lest both communities be destroyed but he permitted the experiment (6).

In 1644, with Mother Patin, John Eudes began to draw up constitutions based on the framework of those of the Visitation nuns and the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*. He originated the garb the sisters were to wear (with the inspiration of Marie des Valees) and sent all to Rome in 1645, through the bishop, for approval. Only in 1647 did he learn that approval was refused, because of the Fourth Vow: "*You are asking too great a thing, something full of danger for these nuns,*" was the Roman Curia's response.

John Eudes had prepared the letter of petition to Innocent X, a letter which the bishop had signed. Some points are quite significant:

*...besides the two classes of persons-those of notorious character and those infected with heresy-we add a third, ladies of fair fame and good birth who aspire to perfection and to engage themselves in the monastic state, or who desire to be received as boarders* (7).

In this letter he also requested dispensation from the *DIVINE OFFICE*, obligatory in monastic orders, and that it be replaced by the *LITTLE OFFICE OF OUR LADY*, so that the sisters might have more time and energy for the apostolate proper to them and for which they were being founded by Father Eudes (8).

In 1647, Mother Patin returned to the Visitation and was replaced by Mother Catherine Theresa of St. Germain. The most promising aspirants left Our Lady of Charity and followed Mother Patin to the Visitation.

In February, 1651, Bishop Mole' of Bayeux, after much questioning and trepidation, raised the Pious Union to a Canonical Diocesan

Congregation. After this canonical step, new candidates requested to be admitted. They had been waiting for a more stable organization and the possibility to pronounce vows.

In 1656, John Eudes banned organs from the chapel of the Order. He compiled the *CUSTOM BOOK* and, with the aid of his niece, a rule for the boarders. These wore a white dress, a silver heart, and went to the dining room with the sisters. In 1660 he made other attempts to obtain approval from the Holy See but to no avail. Instead, Rome suggested inserting in the constitutions many articles to protect the sisters from "contagion."

On November 16, 1664, two Trappist abbots on a business trip to Rome took the cause of Our Lady of Charity to heart and defended it, aided by Cardinal De Ritz. The response was:

*Considering that the sisters have been engaged in the care of penitents for over twenty years and have not deviated themselves, the Fourth Vow can be considered capable of confirming them in their vocation rather than a danger to them (10).*

On January 2, 1666, Pope Alexander VII approved the order with the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE* and the constitutions drawn up by Father Eudes. These latter he had compiled and corrected during these years of trial and experimentation. The congregation was thus raised to Pontifical Status with the right of protection by the Holy See. The sisters over twenty-one years of age, after making a retreat, pronounced the solemn vows of religion and the Fourth Vow in 1667. The Council of Trent permitted vows at the age of seventeen but because of Rome's apprehension regarding the Fourth Vow, the minimum age for the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity was fixed at twenty-one years. The Fourth Vow bound them *"to work for the salvation of penitent women."* This was a great day for St. John Eudes. In his homily to the sisters he said,

*My dear Sisters...Daughters of the Holy Heart of the Mother of Fair Love! here is the long expected day when you are about to pronounce your holy vows. Do it with a great heart and a willing spirit (corde magno et animo volenti).*

Bishop Mole' had died and Bishop Servien, who had replaced him, did not approve of *"John Eudes or the 'little house of charity.'*" At this date he deprived Father Eudes of the direction of the community

and appointed his vicar general to that part. This was a great blow and brought deep suffering to John Eudes, but he continued to write to the sisters and to work on their documents and constitutions.

In 1668 Mother Patin died. On December 2, 1668, Mother Blessed Sacrament Pierre was elected superior, the first religious of Our Lady of Charity to be given this responsibility. She considered her first duty the editing of the constitutions. Up to this time there was only a manuscript copy of the book of rules, which dated back to the first years of the order, and which had been corrected gradually. Before making the constitutions permanent, John Eudes wanted them to be tried out through daily experience. He had worked on them with Mother Patin and with his niece, Sister Nativity Herson. The *ANNALS* declare that "*his humility was so great he always gave way to their ideas*" (11).

As it was customary in the Church that constitutions of religious orders be based on one of the three great rules (Saints Basil, Augustine, Benedict), Father Eudes based his on the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*, which dates back to the year 397. The Sisters had lived this rule for many years. He now began to formulate definitive constitutions for Our Lady of Charity based on this rule and on the constitutions of the Visitation nuns.

In a letter of 1666 he stated that "*for the format and some of the articles*" he had drawn on Saint Francis de Sales' constitutions for the Visitation nuns. But the articles specifically related to the "*spirit and the apostolate*" of Our Lady of Charity he had written himself and offered them now to the sisters as "*coming directly from the Hearts of Jesus and Mary,*" that is, the fundamental constitution and that on *Charity*.

In 1670, nineteen years after the establishment of the community and four years after approval by the Holy See, these constitutions appeared in print. This edition comprised:

- the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*, which had been their initial rule -the *WISHES OF FATHER EUDES* as Preface
- a fundamental constitution (or first chapter) which embodied
- the end or goal, the spirit, the nature of the institute
- the members
- the exercises which flow from the virtue of religion
- the following of Christ through the three vows and the

## Fourth Vow

- the sacramental and prayer life
- rules and virtues for living together and general behaviour befitting consecrated persons
- roles, job descriptions, responsibilities
- admission of members, dismissals, burials
- a directory

In 1679, one year before his death, Saint John Eudes revised these constitutions, working with his niece, Sister Herson, and Mother M. Infant Jesus. This new edition was not printed until 1741, after a general assembly of the order held in Paris at which two representatives from each community, thirteen in all, took part. The only article of John Eudes' work to be changed at that time was that concerning music in church; harmoniums were now permitted but no singing in parts. The *BOOK OF CUSTOMS* was completely re-edited. Both were approved by Benedict XIV, September 26, 1741.

The approved constitutions are very important because through them the Fourth Vow became the core, uniting the group in religious life. The emphasis was on zeal for the salvation of souls and the imitation of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, inflamed "*towards souls created in the image and likeness of God, and redeemed by the Precious Blood of His Son*" (12). Hence the value of the person and the value of the vocation of service are fundamental from the beginning of the order. We also note that spiritual and moral aspects are emphasized -- conversion and instruction.

These were the *CONSTITUTIONS* and *BOOK OF CUSTOMS* Mary Euphrasia lived at Tours and brought with her to Angers.

Past studies to compare the constitutions of Father Eudes with those of the Visitation nuns make evident that each has its distinctive character. A certain sweetness and unction of Saint Francis de Sales is in both, but in John Eudes' constitutions there is an additional element of strength combined with emphasis on zeal for the salvation of souls. "*In the Visitation constitutions, strength is hidden in sweetness. In Our Lady of Charity's, suavity is shrouded in strength*" (13).

In number one, the *fundamental constitution*, Father Eudes treated of the end of the institute. He seemed to surpass himself in showing forth the grace and beauty of the Fourth Vow. His words are so forceful that one is touched and animated, according to the *ANNALS* (14), "*by an ardent desire to labor with all of our strength*



for the salvation of souls. " He cited many Doctors of the Church and other saints to sustain his principles.

His definition of the mission of Our Lady of Charity is contained in number two of this constitution after the explanation of the general end: to follow Christ in poverty, chastity and obedience:

*The peculiar and particular end, and that which distinguishes it from all others (communities), is to imitate as much as possible, by means of divine grace, the most ardent charity of the most amiable Heart of Jesus, Son of Mary, and of Mary, Mother of Jesus, inflamed towards souls created to the image and likeness of God, and redeemed by the Precious Blood of His Son (15).*

In this first chapter John Eudes brought out clearly the value of a person--soul as he says. His times did not see a dichotomy between body, soul, spirit. "Soul" meant the whole person.

He insisted many times on the apostolic nature of Our Lady of Charity in his writings and constitutions:

*Oh! my dear sisters, how holy is your Vocation, how advantageous is your condition,' what goodness of God to you in calling you to an Institute so truly Apostolic!... if you find some disgust in this Mission, this exercise of charity, cast your eyes on the crucifix and recall to mind the sufferings of Jesus for these dear souls...(16).*

*The most divine of all things is to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls, especially of those who are abandoned and without help....*

*It is for this purpose that our Institute has been established in the Church. The sisters have not entered this Congregation to save themselves alone, but to cooperate in the salvation of souls....*

*This is the first and principal of their Constitutions, the most important of their obligations, the spirit and soul of their Institute, the way God has chosen for them to come to Him....*

*To this end they shall employ their mind and heart, their care and works, to become worthy co-operators with Jesus Christ in the work of the salvation of souls, redeemed by His Precious Blood...(17).*

His words concerning the penitents also denote a spirit:

*They shall receive as far as the convenience and means of the House will permit, all those who freely present themselves....*

The *EXPLANATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS* goes on to say:

*Superiors must be guided by their conscience in this matter and be careful that any inconvenience or want of means be real and not a pretext. They should count upon the help of Divine Providence (18).*

The Constitution continues: *"There shall be no obligation to receive any by force or constraint."* And the *EXPLANATION*: *"This permits the sisters the liberty to receive persons under constraint when charity or some other motive requires it" (19).*

It might be well to recall here that in John Eudes' time these persons were mandated to the general hospital or other institutions by force of law. The saint respected their God-given gift of freedom, but offered them help if they freely chose it. On the other hand, he did not absolutely prohibit receiving others who were under constraint.

In 1705, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity began to accept not only penitents who came of their own free will, but also those who were placed by their parents or civil authority. The injunction, *"the same sisters should not always be employed with the penitents but shall be changed some time for greater security"* reflected the fears of the Roman Curia. The *EXPLANATION* says, *"This charge shall be entrusted to the most zealous and most grounded in the spirit of the Institute... They shall possess the capacity needed to instruct and govern the penitents" (20).*

Father Eudes did not omit the conditions exacted by the Roman Curia regarding the separation of the religious from the penitents in their living quarters, but in a letter he explained, *"You will use them if and when needed."* The *EXPLANATION* continues:

*It may be said that although all are not employed with the penitents, all the sisters do lab or for the salvation of souls since we are but one. Those who sing in the choir do so for the sisters who are engaged with the penitents and in the kitchen; in the same way that these sing and lab or in the*

*person of their sisters, because all form but one body. Now just as the feet, hands and eyes of the body do not hinder each other, but work together for its preservation, so each of us must do what obedience enjoins for the common good of religion.*

And this important statement:

*All the other laws and observances which John Eudes has given us are only, so to speak, means to attain this sole end which he proposed to himself in the establishment of our Institute. He told us several times in his familiar conversations, that if he had foreseen that any office or exercise would ever so little have hindered or turned us from this first and essential obligation, he would immediately have forbidden it, his intention and the will of God in our regard being that we should employ in it, our mind, heart, care and industry as he directed in this Constitution (21).*

Father Eudes expected the sisters to be imbued with great zeal in order to live this fundamental constitution. The *EXPLANATION* quotes from one of his letters: "No person must ever be admitted to holy profession who has not great zeal for the salvation of souls and a great desire to labor for this end..." (22). "Our spirit, my dear daughters, is zeal for the salvation of souls. "

The second chapter dealt with the members and the moral and spiritual qualities to be expected of them. Their desire to labor for the salvation of souls was basic. As necessitated by that period of history, (50% of the people were illiterate) provision was made for *choir* and *lay* sisters.

The spirit of the next few chapters demonstrates how the *virtue of religion* was always a dominant one for John Eudes. The liturgy, office, Eucharist, sacraments, sermons are all treated. This witnesses to the necessity of a sacramental prayer life for the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. Daily exercises were spelled out as they were in the Visitation constitutions. There was a chapter on preaching.

The vows were treated as clearly of an apostolic nature as well as related to the Rule of Saint Augustine. Obedience required "perfect indifference in taking up or leaving any employment when asked to do so. " Chastity was for Christ: "The sisters ought to live, breath and aspire only to their heavenly Spouse. They shall avoid speaking

*with the penitents of sins contrary to this virtue" (23).* It is important to remember that John Eudes was writing and referring to *voluntary penitents*, i.e. those who desired conversion to God. No one knew better than he that morality is less taught by others than learned personally, while getting closer to God and experiencing God's love. His aim was to reach persons at a conversion and salvation level. Poverty was gospel poverty. The *EXPLANATION* referred especially to gospel poverty and obedience and to evangelical generosity. It recalled having all in common, good use of time and talents, and the dignity of work. The chapters on the vows consider them a sacred covenant with God to follow Jesus. Their language and content reflect the times and the common usage of course, but there is a certain ardor in the description of the motivational aspects of the vows.

There is no special chapter on the Vow of Zeal, as we have become accustomed to call our Fourth Vow. This expression is first used officially in our constitutions of 1956.

Father Eudes' chapter on the vows in general mentioned the Fourth Vow in this way:

*They shall make a fourth vow which is to devote themselves and to lab or as far as obedience shall call them to it, in the conversion and instruction of penitent girls and women who voluntarily place themselves under their direction.*

The spirit of this vow was fully expressed in the first and *fundamental constitution* of 1679.

There was no special chapter on community, a fact which continued until our 1969 Interim Constitutions. But the beautiful and meaningful chapter on charity embodies a life program on relationships and behavior and all that is required in good community living. The *ANNALS* state:

*John Eudes wished that the name of Religious of Our Lady of Charity be not a mere sound or symbol but have its full meaning in the life of each religious. He desired that charity be the Queen, the Rule, the Soul and the Life of the Congregation (24).*

Therefore, his Chapter XIX on *CHARITY* shows the way to make this a reality in our lives:

*To have no eyes to see the faults of our neighbor, or ears to hear her spoken ill of, or mouth to accuse, or understanding to judge, or will to condemn, or memory to recollect anything against her, but a merciful heart to have compassion, a charitable tongue to excuse, and a patient spirit to bear with her....*

*Let CHARITY be the queen, the rule, the soul and the life of this congregation, let it unite all the hearts, souls and minds of the sisters so closely that they may all have but one heart, one soul and one mind; let it shine in their countenance, in their mouth, in their hands, in their words, in their actions, and in all places and all things; and let it cause them to produce the fruit of these divine words of the great apostle Paul:*

*Charity is patient, is kind; it believes, hopes and endures to the end.*

The chapters on Gratitude, Humility and Simplicity treat these at length and have come down to us through Saint Mary Euphrasia as basic to Good Shepherd spirit. These identical chapters are in all the editions of the Constitutions up to 1955-56 edition. At that time they were condensed in language form but not in substance.

The chapter on Silence was intended to foster recollection and contemplation. The chapters on Modesty, the Enclosure, Corrections, Work, Recreation, Conversing with Others, Noon Assembly, and the Daily Exercises were evidently borrowed from the Visitation nuns and were clearly monastic in origin.

Father Eudes did not fear to prescribe more austerities than Francis de Sales. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity were to fast on the vigil of nearly all the feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady and every Friday from the feast of Saint Michael to Easter. Here one feels the force of his character, as in some other chapters already mentioned.

The rest of the constitutions are what we might call job or role descriptions. They too exhale a spirit, albeit of monastic discipline, but they focus on an orderly, serene, and responsible living in community. Probably much of the material in these constitutions could be placed more appropriately in a spiritual directory or other document other than the constitutions. But their insertion in the book of constitutions probably reflected the monastic tradition for religious Women of the time.

At the end of the book of Constitutions for the religious, we find Rules for the Penitents (25) and for each category of widow-boarders and young girl-boarders. Each was organized as a small monastery with its own rules and regulations. The directress was considered the superior responsible for the group.

A directory followed the constitutions proper.



Illustration in the 1648 French Edition of  
*The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus*

### **III HISTORICAL ITINERARY CONTINUED WITH SAINT MARY EUPHRASIA**

In 1835, when Saint Mary Euphrasia submitted to the Church for approval her inspiration of a centralized organization, her proposed amendment to the original constitutions of John Eudes, revised in 1741, read thus:

*Constitution 52: As the Holy Spirit gives us to understand in several parts of Scripture that union is strength, in order that this Congregation may work more efficaciously for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, its members will be united by a bond of common obedience... the congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd will form one community of goods and members.*

Our 1956 Constitutions re-echo this concept: *"the whole congregation of the Good Shepherd forms but one family."*

We know that Mary Euphrasia had no intention of founding a new congregation. She did not even desire to make any small changes in the habit. She wrote to an intimate sister that although she felt impelled by an inner force to work to establish the generalate in order to spread the Kingdom, she was very "attached to the old and would want to change nothing of it unless she was ordered by Rome to do "(26). But the Holy Spirit was leading, and the zeal for the salvation of souls of John Eudes received through her a new impetus and

a new spirit. In fact, a new religious congregation was erected in the Church, constituted by an official act of the Church, which also ratified its *RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE*, and constitutive document called "*CONSTITUTIONS*" of which *Constitution 52* was a completely new chapter, as was *Constitution 50*, concerning the Cardinal Protector.

Mary Euphrasia's gesture, as seen by a layman in 1874 (27), was considered a response to the signs of the times. "The generalate was a means of turning the material progress and the rapidity of communication of her day to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls." (For example, we remember the sewing machines, telegraph, trains, printing!).

In 1835-36 the *CONSTITUTIONS* of Father Eudes were enlarged by new chapters on central government to implement the papal decree and brief of 1835. These chapters dealt with the role of the Superior General, her election, the nomination of Local Superiors, as well as small changes in the habit. There was also a chapter on the Cardinal Protector. The different expressions which appeared throughout the *CONSTITUTIONS* emphasized a new spirit.

This new spirit was related to the impact of the title *Good Shepherd* which the Church had added and which generated a new spirituality. A broadening vision resulted too from the very fact of a generalate which entailed availability and mobility for mission. The Vow of Obedience now incorporated the Sisters into a world-wide community, unified by a Superior General, and the formula of the vow expressed this change. The vow stated,

*...according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers, under the jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop and of the Holy Apostolic See; and under the immediate authority of the Superioress of the Motherhouse of Angers, who has been established and constituted by the Holy See Superioress General of all the said Congregation and to whom I promise to obey and be submissive....*

This phrasing on obedience was to remain until the 1899 edition of the *CONSTITUTIONS*. By then the generalate was solidly established and there was no need to specify these details.

The Fourth Vow too was brought up to date to incorporate con-



cern for the girls "confided to us through competent authority."

Although the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity had accepted younger girls "confided through competent authority" since 1704, Saint Mary Euphrasia was moved to include their care in the expression of the Fourth Vow, which in that period of Good Shepherd history was spelled out thus in clear, precise terms. The 1836 formula of the Fourth Vow reads:

*...as also to employ myself in the instruction of the penitent girls and women who submit themselves voluntarily, or shall be forced by legitimate and competent authority to submit themselves, to the guidance of the religious of this Congregation to be converted and to do penance.*

It is interesting to note that in the process for canonization of Saint Mary Euphrasia one of our contemplative sisters told the judges how our saint felt about working for young delinquents who came to her under constraint. These were very numerous in her times and were condemned to prison life with adults--robbers, murderers, prostitutes. Mary Euphrasia felt that these young delinquents also needed opportunity for an encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd. She wanted to educate them, not punish them.

In the ADDENDUM following these pages are the various formulas of vows, beginning with Saint Mary Euphrasia's expression after the establishment of the Congregation with a general administration in 1835.

## **IV      SAINT MARY EUPHRASIA           AND HER TIMES**

We will now look briefly at Mary Euphrasia's times, two hundred years after John Eudes; times which led to the changes she advocated.

Our saint's life spanned seven politically different regimes of government, four minor revolutions, and two famines. Historians describe how she embodied in miniature the glorious history of her people of Vendee on the west coast of France. *"She belonged to this people whose very soul is faith itself, a faith as deep as it is simple, a people of strong will and energy, tenacious in purpose and straightforward"* (28).

Her human itinerary seemed orchestrated toward breaking a heart which was as tender as it was strong. Her life was a succession of separations, deaths, illness, immense tasks, superhuman responsibilities, and an equivocal suffering with the Church and from some members of the Church, suffering with loved ones whose spirit and life she shared, and suffering at their hands, even to the point of rejection. At times she was unable to bring about reconciliation, she whose total dedication to God and to humanity aimed at bringing about that triple peace which alone gives joy to life.

In her suffering at the hands of the official local Church, Mary Euphrasia was to reveal that it was her obedience which kept her faithful to her vocation, an obedience born of painful discernment.

We know how she experienced her special vocation of "*zeal for the salvation of souls*" and how she pursued it in spite of all the pressures to the contrary which were made upon her. She had entered Our Lady of Charity in 1814. The condition of women and young girls in France was not much better after the Revolution, than it had been during Father Eudes' time. In fact, younger people were often enduring even worse suffering than older women two hundred years earlier. Wars and revolutions had decimated families and left children homeless, and the industrial movement created numerous social and family problems. Change was rapid and the innocent exploited. What did not change was society's expressed scorn and rejection of its exploited ones, and an attitude not unlike snobbishness toward persons who expressed compassion toward these victims.

In 1825, when she was twenty-nine years of age, the sisters elected Mary Euphrasia superior of the community in Tours, even though their Rule specified a minimum age of forty. Her zealous heart stretched beyond the limited horizons of Tours. Even as a novice she had felt called to expand her zeal and had asked a Carmelite friend to pray that she might reach out and save many souls in foreign countries. By 1833, she was superior of the House of the Good Shepherd at Angers, having been called there in 1829 to re-open a *Good Shepherd* Center which existed before the Revolution.

In 1848 there was a famine. The sisters sold all their tableware to feed their large household of over one thousand persons, not counting the hundreds who came daily to their kitchen for food. She declared, "*As long as we have ten cents we will share it.*"

She was appalled by the social condition of young people and felt that young delinquents, because of their age, should be protected from punishment. For, in 1815, youth and children as young as age six were imprisoned with adult criminals for petty theft and prostitution. By 1817, special sections were organized in the common prison for these younger ones, but nothing was done for their education or moral development. In fine, they were punished.

Many horizons opened up to Saint Mary Euphrasia, who had vowed her life for these young people. When requested, she responded to various social needs, but her main concern was for the socially and spiritually destitute young girl, without defense. At this point in history these young women were considered beyond help, beyond, the reach of society and religion.

Together with her vocation towards serving voluntary penitents, Mary Euphrasia heard a second call. She meditated on the Gospel story of Christ's attitude toward the adulteress brought before Him for judgment, against her will. Mary Euphrasia's faith told her that God's word was effective here. Christ had said to the adultress, "Go in peace and sin no more." The woman's life changed after that brief interview with Him. Her person changed. Mary Euphrasia was convinced that this could happen also to those outcast young girls in the grip of law. They too could be touched through kindness and God's grace, through encounter with human compassion and divine mercy, but they needed a chance. She was driven to give them this chance (29).

In 1835 Mary Euphrasia succeeded in having a group of youthful offenders confided to her institute, so that they might be protected from the horror and corruption of the common prison. She organized a separate section for them. By 1853 she had set up an agricultural and professional center for sixty of these young people from the common prison at Rennes; and, in 1854, three sisters went from Angers to Clairvaux to accompany one hundred others to the new site prepared for them on the outskirts of Angers, called Nazareth. In 1855 she organized a half-way house to serve and prepare young girls and women at least a year before they were legally released from prison.

St. Mary Euphrasia did not discriminate between race or religion or even geographical distance. She simply had preference for the most-deprived, those deprived of hope and love, and for the most suffering and deviant. Her gift was to restore, to build up, to re-educate, socially and spiritually. Through a special spiritual grace she was given an exceptional awareness of the merciful love of God reflected in Jesus the Good Shepherd. Her homes provided ways of announcing and living out this love. This special grace she received gave her a deep insight into human behavior and into the needs of youth.

Mary Euphrasia drew courage and tenacity from the living sources of the Church and from Scripture. The parable of the Good Shepherd captivated her in its every detail, as did Ezekiel's poem and Psalm 23. She had a tender veneration for the Pope, whom she saw as the supreme shepherd through whom she reached the one Good Shepherd, Christ Jesus.

From 1838 on, through her sisters, Mary Euphrasia met the needs of troubled youth and women all over the world. Over the space of

forty years she organized one hundred and twenty centers in seventeen countries.

Our foundress was a woman of incredible activity, yet she was also a mystic, a great contemplative, as her spiritual director testified. She was referred to as the "*Teresa of the Nineteenth Century.*" One of her contemporaries, the Eudist Father Le Dore, declared that he felt he witnessed "*the spirit of Saint Paul and of Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Teresa reborn in Mother Euphrasia*" (30). The mayor of Angers declared her the most intelligent "man" in the city of Angers. The Bishop of St. Claude went further, "*If Mother Pelletier were a man she would be elected Pope. She is capable of governing the whole Church*" (31). Another Eudist called her "*an admirable woman, capable of leading the whole world.*"

But the most touching tribute to her is that of the people of her own century. She was known in her times and to the so-called "ir-redeemables" as the "*image of a tender and merciful God who loves and forgives.*" And this was at a period when God was preached as the "*almighty terrible judge who punishes.*"

Within her special vocation, Mary Euphrasia felt she had several special missions, one of which was to encircle the globe with a spirit of compassionate and merciful zeal. The generalate was organized for the purpose of carrying on this special mission. She had no intention, initially, of founding a new order. She loved the Order of Our Lady of Charity. Her call to make effective around the world the merciful love of God, her keen discernment of the signs of her times, and the Church itself brought this new order into being. In fact, Mary Euphrasia says, "*It is the Church herself who has founded us.*"

Historically, it was a Good Shepherd home that Saint Mary Euphrasia was called to revitalize in Angers in 1829. This often overlooked fact deserves more detailed attention. We recall that two hundred years earlier, in 1641, at the time Father Eudes was confiding his converts to pious women, already in 1640 the "*House of St. Magdalen*" for repentent girls and women was founded in Angers by Margaret DesHayes, who was known as "*Sister Therese.*" She died in 1674 in Angers.

A second house called the "*Good Shepherd*" was founded for girls and women who had left the house of penitents and who were desirous of achieving a more far-reaching change. This was 1692. A non-cloistered community began this work in a hotel on St. Nicholas

Street in Angers. As was the "*House of St. Magdalen*," so too the "*Good Shepherd*" was located in Holy Trinity parish. Both were discontinued by the French Revolution and the buildings confiscated by the revolutionaries and used as prisons.

At the outset of the Revolution, the widow of Pierre LeRoy de la Potherie Chevalier (Knight) Lord of Neuville escaped the war by going to Belgium with her son Auguste, and then to England, where he completed his studies. Returning to Angers in 1810, Countess Marie Innocente John Baptist de Lentivu de Neuville found her many possessions intact. She devoted herself to the care of prostitutes, and desired to reestablish the "*Good Shepherd*" destroyed by the Revolution. This good lady died November 6, 1827. To her son, Auguste, she left 30,000 francs to be used to restore the "*Good Shepherd*," something she had not been able to accomplish herself.

Count Auguste de Neuville took the sum to Bishop Montault des Isles, Bishop of Angers, who advised him to wait until times were better. The bishop later, however, received a letter from a dying penitent woman in his diocese who testified to the help she had received from the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Caen Refuge. She begged him to provide a similar house in his diocese.

Around this time, Sister M. Euphrasia, newly elected superior of Tours, had founded the community of Sisters Magdalens. To a dying sister she confided her inner urge to reach out to many more young women and girls she knew to be in need of help. Mother Euphrasia asked this sister to obtain an assurance from God that her inspiration was from Him.

Bishop Montault des Isles, meanwhile, was being struck by the coincidence of the letter from the Angers penitent and de Neuville's gift. He called the pastor of the Church of the Trinity, who got in touch with a friend in Paris, Countess D' Andigne, also of Angers and Tours. He requested her to find someone in Paris willing and able to reorganize the Good Shepherd in Angers. Her response was that Sister Euphrasia of Tours was the person.

The pastor twice visited Tours and on his second visit invited Sister Euphrasia and the community to refound the Good Shepherd in Angers. This community, it must be remembered, had only recently come out of the horrors of the Revolution and was still trying to reestablish itself in Tours. But Mother Euphrasia saw in all these happenings an answer from Heaven. Her zeal must reach out across the world. She was aware of a summons to bring new life, the

newness of Christ. There was an urgency about her contemplation of these occurrences, an intensity in her human presence.

More recently, Vatican II has emphasized that the Holy Spirit moves through history. The Holy Spirit, working through all the opposition that confronted Mary Euphrasia in her mission, flashed before the world *The Merciful Love Of The Father Revealed In Jesus The Good Shepherd*. The Good Shepherd is the compassionate love of the Father for us. This is the background to Mary Euphrasia's inspiration of a centralized administration to spread the *Good News* of God's merciful love. This is the background to the Constitutions proper to the Congregation of the Good Shepherd.

## **V GOOD SHEPHERD CONSTITUTIONS UP TO THE PRESENT**

To return to the Constitutions of the new congregation. These Constitutions were printed in Rome under the direction of Cardinal Odescalchi, who entrusted to Father Kohlman S.J. the work of revising and adapting them to the Brief establishing the Order with a generalate. Father de Villefort, S. J., secretary to the Superior General of the Jesuits, supervised the printing and editing. They were approved on November 1, 1836. Father Vaures, O.F.M. Conv., who had been a faithful consultant to Mary Euphrasia in the matter of papal approbation, dispatched the copies of the new Constitutions from Rome to Angers in March, 1837.

In 1867, there was a reprint and some changes to accommodate the erection of provinces, which had been approved by the Holy See in July, 1855.

Again in 1897-98, there was a third reprint with no notable changes. However, this edition was also approved by the Holy See.

In 1924-25, there was a partial revision to accommodate and harmonize with the 1917 Code of Canon Law, especially concerning confessors and liberty of conscience. The first chapter or "*fundamental constitution*" was retained in its complete form in all these editions.

In the 1955-56 edition there appeared the first explicit mention of the Fourth Vow as a "*vow of zeal*" although all through the Process



of Canonization it was called the "Vow of Zeal." There was a new arrangement of chapters, the language modernized, and new chapters were added. For example, apostolic works proper to the congregation were spelled out; a chapter on the Vow and Virtue of Zeal, and chapters on the Juniorate, on Renewal, and on Religious Life and Prayer were added. There were additions and deletions in the chapters on the Vow and Virtue of Obedience and of Poverty. Chastity was given a new dimension. The "*fundamental constitution*" was retained as a first chapter, but it was greatly abridged.

In this edition, the *RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE* was printed in the appendix, but in an edited form with some articles omitted. These were obsolete articles, most of which had never been enforced because they pertained to situations no longer current, such as covering books, taking baths, showing hair under the veil. The spirit of this Rule, however, continued to persist even in the 1969 *Interim Constitutions*, especially in what relates to the traditional vows, and to community relationships.

Most of the chapters were completely reworked. Except for the first chapter and the chapter on Charity, most of the former pious expressions were omitted. There was emphasis on the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, the Sacred Congregation of Religious, the Local Bishop and the Cardinal Protector.

This edition, like the earlier ones, lent itself to a merging of the juridical norms with the text so that there was, therefore, no section of juridical norms. The style was serious, compact, simple, rather juridical, and very detailed in certain chapters.

It is interesting to note that there was still no special chapter on Community. However, the roles, elements and virtues that constitute a living community were treated in detail.

At this time the congregation had also begun the process of presenting for approval a new *BOOK OF CUSTOMS*. It was dropped however because changes were coming at too great a pace; it was never finished. We had other integrating books, such as the *SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY*, *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES*, *CHOIR DIRECTORY*, a *BOOK OF PRAYERS* and a *CEREMONIAL BOOK* for Receptions and Professions, which usually carried the formula of vows. These books were considered obsolete with Vatican II and dropped. Therefore, for the first time: the formula of vows was Incorporated In the 1969 edition of Constitutions.

Regarding all these constitutions, in spite of their language, style and detail, one gets the impression that once the goal of the congregation was clearly stated in the *fundamental* first chapter, all the rest seemed to fall into place quite simply. The rest was there to indicate the norms of orderly living together of people pursuing the same goals.

Given the times of Father John Eudes and of Mary Euphrasia neither of them could have organized a perfectly balanced apostolic community, as perhaps we envision it, and obtained its approval. It is important to consider also the time, energy and suffering John Eudes and Mary Euphrasia endured to go forward toward the goal in an effort to respond to the needs of their times; Father Eudes restricted to France, Mary Euphrasia embracing the world.

In 1969 we received our Interim Constitutions which, according to Vatican II were intended to omit all obsolete practices and to express gospel values, the intention and spirit of the foundress, and to reflect the signs of the times. We find in them, consequently, a net departure in format and content, but not in spirit, from all the previous ones. The book has two definite parts, probably on account of the way it was originally worked. Each chapter was edited by a different commission in a different country. The whole was then corrected, rewritten and confirmed by our general chapter of 1969.

The juridical, or practical part, forms a distinctive second section, some of which is constitutive, and some by-laws, This edition did not require official approval by the Holy See. It was considered *a way of life* until experimentation would lead to definite constitutions.

Almost every chapter of the first part of these Interim Constitutions contained theological, biblical and ecclesial principles and some exhortative phrases. Most of the practical implications, when there are any, are very bland. Juridical implications are usually attached to the second part. This was our first constitution with a chapter on Community (32). There was a chapter on Apostolic Zeal (33) and a mention of missionary spirit and evangelization.

There was a chapter on the Apostolate (35). There were many expressions of this apostolate throughout the book. The formula of the vows (36) was less explicit in regard to the Fourth Vow than in the very first constitutions. It expressed the general intention of this vow-the salvation of souls.

There are historical elements also, probably redundant in a con

stitutive document. The language is modern and pleasing. It is conducive to reflection and meditation. It seems that the commissions sought to discover the fundamental values and spirit contained in Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia's constitutions and teachings, according to the themes assigned them.

In a general way, this 1969 edition offered a surprising openness to new modes of *being* and *doing* for the Kingdom. At the same time our weak points were expressed therein in such a way that we very simply recognized them at their face value. Take, for example, our authority-obedience relationships, our prayer-life, our community life! Many sisters sensed a presence of the Spirit as they read and meditated on the values always sacred to us, but now expressed in new terms in the completely new format of an official document. From 1969 to 1985 we have had ample time to savor our rich heritage spread there before our minds and our hearts.

Our General Chapter convened in June-August 1985 to complete the editing of our final constitutions. These had been in the making throughout the congregation during the five preceding years. In manuscript form they were presented to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, for Church approval. Consultors examine them separately and carefully and usually suggest some changes and additions. Once these are incorporated, the manuscript passes to the *Congresso* for more scrutiny and eventual further additions, corrections, or deletions.

Therefore, the whole Church is interested in our way of life and how we ourselves envision living it. The whole Church is interested in helping us find the best way to express our consecration "*to live in union with Jesus the Good Shepherd and continue his saving mission in the Church.*" The Church is interested in helping us live our charism authentically and in enabling us to pass it, in its authenticity, to others after us. The Spirit gives charisms for the life and vitality of the Church, for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. *Zeal of Compassion and Mercy* are not the least important in the salvation history of our world.

Together with the Church's scrutiny and approval, we are studying this latest edition, a masterpiece of the combined effort and insight, desires and aspirations of the whole congregation. It contains much of the 1969 edition and the successive decisions of our General Chapters from that date to the present. It represents a development in growth in several areas since the 1969 edition. We are each invited to study and understand them in depth. A few remarks

however will not be out of place here.

That we maintained distinct chapters for prayer and community life continues to denote the needs of our times, while renunciation and penitence found a rightful place in the chapter *Our Prayer*. We do not however emphasize that our prayer and penitence are also traditionally apostolic in nature.

The chapters on Consecrated Chastity, Gospel Poverty, and Religious Obedience are more to the point than former ones. We do not however refer to the spirit of Saint Augustine which informed our earlier constitutions, nor do we emphasize the primacy of love for God and for neighbor. True, these concepts are found diffused throughout these chapters. The criteria for admissions, traditional for Saint Mary Euphrasia and Count de Neuville - love for our mission and zeal for souls - do not figure specifically in these constitutions, nor any special criteria for admissions. However, the tenor of the constitutions themselves and the chapter on FORMATION do give some indications.

In the Prologue we try to place these constitutions in a more rational historical context, and to recognize our congregation in its distinctive character approved by the Church, as founded by Saint Mary Euphrasia. In a general way, these constitutions present us a way of life for mature religious of the Good Shepherd. In living them we will be aware of the tug of cultural trends and values in which we are immersed.

At this point, Saint Mary Euphrasia's words come to me as a very appropriate and Spirit-filled closing:

*Let us not live our constitutions according to our moods and caprices, but let us regulate our moods and caprices according to our constitutions (37).*

And these words also, so full of unction of the Spirit:

*Let us keep our constitutions in our heart, in our mind, in our hands so that they may keep us! (38).*

By following her teaching, we will begin a new phase of our history, revitalized by the same Spirit whose charism enlivened and empowered Saint Mary Euphrasia!

## *V REFLECTION GUIDE*

1. What function have CONSTITUTIONS in our lives?
2. What is the relation of our CONSTITUTIONS to our GOOD SHEPHERD CHARISMS?
3. What charismatic GIFT did Saint John Eudes receive before founding the Order of Our Lady of Charity?
4. Upon what great Rule of the early Church were Father Eudes' and Mary Euphrasia's Constitutions based?
5. What made the First or FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION so important? (Each chapter of a Book of Constitutions was called CONSTITUTION, First Constitution, Second Constitution, and so on).
6. What were the main differences between the Constitutions of Our Lady of Charity of 1679 and those of Saint Mary Euphrasia of 1836? Name a few.
7. With what CHARISMS was Saint Mary Euphrasia especially gifted?
8. What do our 1985 Constitutions reflect to us, even though the format and some language expressions have changed?
9. What chapters of these Constitutions impress you as most expressive of our Charism, Mission, Spirit and Spirituality?
10. Do you feel you can make of these Constitutions an authentic way of life, that is, live your Good Shepherd Charism, Spirit, Mission and Spirituality to the full as you would wish?

VII ADDENDUM  
FORMULAS OF VOWS

1836-1899

I, Sister Mary of N. N..., in presence of our very honored Mother Mary of N. N..., Superioress General (or Provincial) of the Community, and of the Religious who compose it, do vow and promise to God to observe all my life Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers, under the jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop and of the Holy Apostolic See; *and under the immediate authority of the Superioress of the Mother-House of Angers, who has been established and constituted by the Holy See Superioress General of all the said Congregation, and to whom I promise to obey and be submissive,' as also to employ myself in the instruction of the penitent girls and women who submit themselves voluntarily, or shall be forced by legitimate and competent authority to submit themselves, to the guidance of the Religious of this Congregation to be converted and to do penance.*

The whole to the greater glory of God, and in honor of the most Blessed Virgin, Mother of this Congregation. Amen.

1899-1925

I, Sister Mary of N...in the hands of your Lordship (or in your hands, as Delegate of his Lordship the Bishop of N...) in presence of our very honoured Mother Mary of N..., Superior (General or Provincial), and of this Community, do vow to God to observe for one year (or all my life) Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of this Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers, approved by the Holy Apostolic See under the authority of the Superior General of the said Congregation. I likewise vow to labour for the salvation of the souls of the persons who enter this house to be converted.

All for the greater glory of God in honour of the most Blessed Virgin, Mother of this Congregation. Amen.

1925-195

I, Sister Mary of N..., in presence of your Lordship (or, in your presence as Delegate of His Lordship the Bishop of N ), and of the Community; in the hands of our very honoured Mother Mary of N... Superior (General or Provincial, or their Delegate), do vow and pro-

mise to God to observe for one year (or all my life) Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of this Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers, approved by the Holy Apostolic See, under the authority of the Superior General of the said Congregation. I likewise vow to labour for the salvation of the souls of the persons who enter our houses to be converted and to do penance.

All for the greater glory of God and in honour of the Most Blessed Virgin, Mother of this Congregation. Amen.

1956-1969

The formula is the same as the preceding one except for the Fourth Vow: ..."I likewise vow to labour for the salvation of souls in the work of the Institute. All for the greater glory of God..."

1969

The formula is the same as that of 1956, except for the Fourth Vow " I likewise vow to labor for the salvation of souls in the apostolate of the Congregation. I hope by the grace of God and the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary to be faithful to my consecration. Amen.

1985

Our 1985 Constitutions give us the following formula for the vows in religious profession:

"In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In the presence of the community in the hands of Sister...Provincial Superior (or delegate of Sister...Provincial Superior), I Sister...vow for all my life (for one year) chastity, poverty, and obedience. Also, I vow zeal, committing myself to live and work for the salvation of souls, especially those to whom I am sent. I make these Vows according to the Constitutions of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, approved by the Church, under the authority of the Superior General. I hope, by the grace of God, the protection of Mary, and the help of my sisters to be faithful my consecration. Amen."

A sister may add an introduction and/or conclusion to the formula. These additions require the approval of the provincial.

## NOTES

1. *CF Perspectives on our Fourth Vow of Zeal*
2. From an early Life: FATHER EUDES, by M.Ch. De Montzey, 1874.
3. See, *Study on the Original Charism of Saint John Eudes*, Manuscript
4. p.6
5. *Annals of Our Lady of Charity*, p. 9
6. *Letter, July 30, 1644*
7. *Annals* p. 42
8. *Annals* p. 43
9. Cf. *Annals* p. 63-54
10. *Life of Father Eudes*, p. 193
11. *Annals*, p. 164
12. *number 2 of Constitutions 14*. p. 57
13. *Annals*, as above
16. *Annals* p. 166
15. *Annals*, p. 167
18. p. 61
17. *Constitution I*, 1679
20. *Explanation*, p. 66
19. *Explanation of the Rule* p. 63
22. p. 58
21. p. 57
24. p. 169
23. An injunction departed from in our 1955 edition
26. *Letter to Sr. M. Stanislas* 1833
25. See *Annals* p. 169
28. See *Pasquier, Life, V ol I*
27. *Life of Father Eudes*, de Montzey, 1874
30. *Process, OP*
29. *Process of Canonization, OP*
32. *Number 34*
31. *Poinsenet*, p. 189
34. *Number 33, par. 7*
33. *Number 30*
36. *Number 35*
35. *Number 7*
38. *Conf Chap. 58*
37. *Conf Chap. 58*

