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Last Will and Testament of Saint Louise de Marillac

BY

BETTY ANN McNEIL, D.C.

Introduction

Born into the aristocratic Marillac family, the emotional scars of never knowing her own mother and the loneliness of that heartache were among the first of the many crosses borne by Louise de Marillac throughout her life. This early suffering was primarily due to her illegitimate birth (1591), her father's remarriage (1595), and subsequent rejection by her stepmother. While very young, her father had placed her in a refined Dominican convent school at Poissy,¹ but Louis de Marillac later transferred his daughter to a boarding home "so that she might learn to do [household and practical] work suitable to her condition."² The untimely death of her beloved father (1604) left Louise an orphan at the vulnerable age of thirteen.

Undaunted by precarious health, Louise developed a profound spiritual life and became a sensitive young woman who reflected the breadth of her cultural experiences with a certain charm, shown especially through kindness and cordiality. Despite Louise being keenly disappointed at not being able to fulfill her earnest desire to be a Capuchin nun, relatives used their connections to arrange a marriage for her to Antoine Le Gras, a secretary to Marie de Médicis. The young bride at twenty-two was delightfully feminine, petite, and vivacious. Yet, history shows that even her wedding day was marked by an aloof social distance by her Marillac relatives, who denied their kinship by signing the marriage register as "friends" rather than family.

Later that year (1613) when Michel was born, the joy Louise experienced in motherhood must have reawakened her own memory

¹Margaret Flinton, D.C., *Louise de Marillac: Social Aspect of Her Work* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 86.

²*Ibid.*, 86.

of maternal deprivation, probably spawning her incessant preoccupation about her son's welfare.³ After Louise first met Vincent de Paul (1625), and through her search for the will of God, she overcame her initial resistance to Vincent and gained a mutually supportive relationship that enriched the rest of her life. Vincent was able to direct this energetic widow's generous impulses towards others and establish an enduring network of charity.⁴ Meanwhile Louise, more alive and socially active than ever, grew in holiness through reaching out to Christ in the sick poor.

Key Events Prior to 1645

In the midst of anguish over her husband's ill health, she became stymied by inner suffering in anticipation of yet another separation by death. However, God spoke to her in her darkness and Louise began to encounter some healing. She had her unforgettable peak experience (1623), a moment of grace when the "Light of Pentecost" illuminated her understanding. She then realized her future involved a mission of assisting the neighbor amidst much coming and going.⁵ Open to the Spirit, she allowed events and prayer to lead her into this prophetic phase of her life's work after Antoine Le Gras died. Loss and anxiety, were feelings woven throughout the fabric of her life, especially during the terminal illness and death (1625) of her husband,⁶ whom she dearly loved, and the later tragic death (1632) of her uncle and guardian, Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seals.

Vincent de Paul's commitment to the poor captivated Louise's compassionate heart and moved her to become more and more involved with his charitable projects. Intuitively believing in the potential of this gracious and pleasant lady who related so warmly to others, Vincent called forth her untapped resources by inviting her collaboration. He gave Louise a mission. In her initial missionary journey Louise visited the Confraternity of Charity at Montmirail

³On 18 October Louise gave birth to her only child Michel-Antoine Le Gras (1613-1696). See Pierre Coste, C.M., *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Joseph Leonard, C.M., 3 Vols. (Brooklyn, New York: 1987), 1:182.

⁴Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, and together he and Louise established the Daughters of Charity in 1633. The Ladies of Charity developed from the first Confraternity of Charity (1617).

⁵*Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac. Correspondence and Thoughts*, trans. and ed. Louise Sullivan, D.C., (Brooklyn, New York: 1991), A.2, 1.

⁶Louise's husband Antoine Le Gras died 21 December 1625 (*ibid.*, 1:193).

(1629). A few years later (1633) the charter members of the Daughters of Charity came to live with Louise for training to serve the sick poor. Soon Vincent began instructing these new sisters. Vincent often consulted Mademoiselle, whose flair for organization is reflected in the rules she wrote for them, although Vincent was the one who explained to these "good village girls" how they "should spend the twenty-four hours that go to make up the day, as the days make up the months, and the months the years that will bring you to eternity."⁷ Louise and Vincent continued collaborating and inculcated the spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity in these new servants of the sick poor. Louise's own humility shone through her "anxiety in all her actions . . . to conform them to those of Our Lord."⁸

God "thought of it," but Louise and Vincent together formed the Company of the Daughters of Charity, which would soon be officially erected as a Confraternity.⁹ That recognition was foundational. Although she was highly energetic, the maternal heart of Louise as a widow was often distracted by anxiety about the welfare of Michel, now a man in his thirties. He caused his mother deep distress because he absconded for several months with a girl friend (1644) and disappeared again (1645) after Louise directly confronted him about his behavior.¹⁰ After the first episode, Louise had the young woman placed with the "Daughters of the Madeleine" (a monastery founded for repentant women), and she saw that her son returned to Saint Lazare while she continued praying for his conversion. These incidents happened just a few months before Louise completed her will. At that time Louise confided in Vincent, "My thought that I am very near death remains with me"¹¹

During this fruitful period of mid-life growth and spiritual deepening, Louise, age fifty-four, completed her last will and testament. It gives us insight into her own most pressing concerns, significant relationships, spiritual activities, and evolving priorities. As other events occurred and altered circumstances, Louise made adjustments.

⁷*Conferences of Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity*, trans. and ed. Joseph Leonard, C.M. (London:1979), 2.

⁸*Ibid.*, 1276.

⁹*Ibid.*, 275. On 20 November 1646 Jean François Paul de Gondi, archbishop of Paris, signed the act of approbation that officially erected the Company of the Daughters of Charity as a Confraternity.

¹⁰Elizabeth Charpy, D.C., "Louise de Marillac: Come Wind or High Water—[The Stormy Years (1645-1649)]," *Echo of the Company* (1987):433.

¹¹26 July 1645, Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings*, 132.

For example, she added two codicils to address changes in Michel's life. The full nineteenth-century English translation of the last will and testament of Louise de Marillac has remained relatively unknown to the present generation since its 1884 publication.¹²

Overview of Will and Codicils

Will (1645)

Louise's son appears as a leitmotif in the text of her will and its two codicils. Employing a hortatory style, Louise reveals her maternal anxieties and directly implores Michel to measure up to his Marillac and Le Gras heritage. She also directs him discreetly to recover an outstanding debt related to her own dowry.¹³ Louise most frequently mentions God, her "good husband Antoine," and their son Michel, the Marillacs, Vincent de Paul, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the poor whom they serve.

Making known her preference regarding the site of her burial, cost and arrangements, Louise describes the type of marker for her grave--a simple wooden cross stating *Spes Unica*.

Louise specifies at least eight legacies. Michel inherits all that is not included in particular bequests. In addition, she states that after his death, should he have no "legitimate offspring," Vincent de Paul should pass the remainder of her son's legacy to the poor.

Louise requests that the Congregation of the Mission celebrate masses and give alms for particular intentions on specific anniversaries. She asks the Daughters of Charity to recite the rosary on certain feasts for the intentions of priests.

After the distribution of her estate, Louise wishes that the Daughters of Charity receive the balance. In this way, their foundress intends to supplement the sisters' efforts to assist the sick poor in rural areas, where there are fewer resources. Louise also includes her confessor, her goddaughter Anne Louise Métais, the "deserving poor" of the town of Montferrand (her husband's hometown), and beggars (for whom she meticulously outlined an instructive sermon). Several confraternities where she was a member receive bequests. She humbly

¹²The English text was originally printed in *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity* by Comtesse de Richmont. Appendix. Translated from the French by a Sister of Charity (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1884), 351-65.

¹³Louise de Marillac married Antoine Le Gras in the church of Saint-Gervais on 5 February 1613 (Coste, *Life*, 1:182).

asks their pardon for not always living up to the recommended devotions. Reflecting on her own experience, she cautions discretion, commenting that it would be better to belong to only a few confraternities in order to be more faithful. Louise belonged to at least six!

Changing Circumstances: 1645-1653

Louise added a codicil to her will after Michel's marriage and the birth of his only child Renée Louise Le Gras.¹⁴ Although now somewhat relieved by Michel's apparent stability, Louise herself had experienced much personal anxiety and turmoil in recent years. The stress surrounding community formation and leadership made Louise increasingly attentive to the importance of organizational considerations. Nevertheless, this faith-filled and tenacious woman of courage lent conviction to her community, even daring to send her first missionary Daughters beyond France to Poland (1652).

Codicil of 1653

The first codicil (dated 28 December 1653), confirms Louise's will (1645) and makes a few changes because Michel, since his marriage, had already begun to receive an annual income from some of his mother's property. Louise says nothing about her daughter-in-law or granddaughter. Yet, she modifies the allocation of bequests for her son, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. Louise also mentions a memorandum about items of furniture, and specifies the location of the deed to the "city house," relating that it is in the drawer of her cabinet from Germany. Louise concludes by reiterating her total gift of self to God, acknowledging that providence has guided her in "every state of life" and asking pardon for her forgetfulness and ingratitude.

Codicil of 1656

On 8 August 1655 Monsieur Vincent presented the rules to the first Daughters of Charity who affirmed their acceptance either by

¹⁴Michel-Antoine Le Gras married Gabrielle Le Clerc, daughter of Lord de Chennevière, 18 January 1650 in the church of Saint-Sauveur. Vincent de Paul witnessed the marriage contract. Louise's only grandchild Renée Louise Le Gras was born in 1653 (Vincent de Paul to Louise de Marillac, 28 January 1640 in *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents. II Correspondence*, vol. 2 [January 1640-July 1646], eds. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., Trans, Marie Poole, D.C., Esther Cavanagh, D.C., James R. King, C.M., Francis Germovnik, C.M., annotated John W. Carven, C.M. [Brooklyn: 1989], 13 and n. 8).

their signature or mark (for those unable to write). This formalization of “the Rules to be handed down to posterity”¹⁵ in the Little Company bears Louise’s imprint. Less than a year later, she continues to be concerned about business details and providing adequately for her son and his family. Despite being confined to bed, she formulated a second codicil (11 May 1656), dictating her latest wishes to notaries who recorded them and witnessed her signature.

This last codicil reveals Louise’s satisfaction with her son’s family situation. Louise alters her will further, so that Michel and his family can derive maximum benefit. Bequests to the Congregation of the Mission are deferred until after her son’s death when distribution would be made to the poor in her parish of Saint Laurent and her confessor. Louise adds a new bequest: that her only grandchild, Louise Rénee (her five year old namesake), might invite the poor of her parish to an annual dinner and serve them herself as guests. Finally, Louise asks that Vincent de Paul,¹⁶ her dear friend and collaborator, serve as executor of her estate along with Michel Le Gras, her son.

The Will of Mademoiselle Le Gras¹⁷

Prostrate in all humility, in the belief that God is in all places, sole being and creator of all immortal souls, with true knowledge of my own nothingness and impotence without his grace, I humbly implore his mercy on my misery, which has made me guilty of so much ingratitude for his goodness. I have offended this goodness by my sins, thus becoming unworthy to participate in the merits of Jesus crucified. Yet in these merits I place all my hope, and supplicate the Holy Virgin to be a true Mother to me and obtain for me pardon for the abuse I have made of the grace of God. To the moment of my death, and subject to the good pleasure of God, I supplicate my good angel guardian, Saint Louis, and all the saints to help me by their intercession in this important passage to which I submit myself, and

¹⁵Leonard, *Conferences*, 722.

¹⁶Vincent de Paul survived Louise, but also died in 1660 on 27 September. His last will and testament, dated 7 September 1630, is published in *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 101 (1936):704-07.

¹⁷Richmont, *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras*, 351-65. Minor editorial changes have been made in this nineteenth-century text in paragraph division, word usage, and grammatical construction in order to facilitate its reading. The author wishes to present the contents of Louise’s will but recognizes the need for an updated English translation that better reflects contemporary usage.

were I not obliged thereto, for the love of God, and to honor the moment of the separation of the divine soul of my Savior, who desires my salvation, that I may glorify Him eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

I protest before God, and before all creatures, that I wish to live and die in the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, and I command my son, as far as I can, to do the same, it being the only path to paradise for which we were created. In the hope that God will grant him this grace, I beseech his bounty to take full possession of all that he is, to do in him and with him his most holy will. I likewise pray him to pour out his most efficacious grace, for time and eternity, the blessing which, as mother, he has empowered me to give, and which I now give him: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. I implore the sacred humanity of our Savior to have pity on our sinful souls at the hour of our death.

I very humbly ask pardon of my good angel and of my most honored father and director, by whom it has pleased the mercy of God to hold me willingly attached to the accomplishment of his most holy will, for the little correspondence and fidelity I have shown for the charitable care that they have done me the honor to take of my salvation. I acknowledge that without this care I would often have turned miserably away from God.

I also most humbly ask pardon of all my dear neighbors whom I have disedified or scandalized by my sins, of those whom I have displeased or offended in any way whatever, and of all creatures of which I have made bad use or contrary to the holy will of God. I abandon myself to God to make such restitution in this world or the next as it will please his merciful justice to ordain.

The obligation of mother, together with the strong natural affection I have always had for my son, urges me to recommend him to remember the care which, for his salvation, the goodness of God had of his education, and to be grateful all his life, striving never to do anything contrary to God's most holy will. To aid you in this, my son, take counsel in all your affairs of persons who are competent and who lead good lives. And that the advice you receive may be more useful to you, always ask it before forming your decision; otherwise you will not freely give your reasons for and against your proposals, and in that case you will deceive yourself.

I rely so much on the kindness of Monsieur Vincent that I am certain he will never refuse you his assistance in your wants, whether

temporal or spiritual. You know how much we owe him, so I entreat you, should you ever be so happy as to have an opportunity to serve him or his company, you will do it with all your heart, remembering that you are particularly obliged to do so, not only in gratitude for all the benefits we have received from him but also for the service he renders to the holy Church, our mother. Do the same, and for the same reason, I beg you, for the gentlemen of the community of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet.¹⁸

I beseech my son often to remember to pray for the soul of his father,¹⁹ to remember his good life, how he greatly feared God and was scrupulous in keeping himself irreproachable, especially recalling his patience in the great sufferings which were sent to him in his last years and in which he practiced very great virtue.

O my son, remember to honor always the Marillacs,²⁰ and to serve them willingly, should God ever send the opportunity to do so. Also Monsieur the Count and Madame the Countess of Maure,²¹ and all those to whom I have the honor to be related. I know they will always retain their affection for me, and while you comport yourself as a man of honor they will never refuse you assistance in your wants, as I humbly supplicate them, remembering that their predecessors have always obliged us in that way, doing us the honor to acknowledge our relationship. What I say, my God, you know to be on account of the need my son, whom you have given me, may have, and not for vainglory.

I declare that the heirs of Monsieur Gachier, in Auvergne, have on hand seven or eight hundred *livres*, without the interest of said sum, since the death of the late Monsieur Le Gras, my husband, which sum belongs to me as his first creditor, on account of my dowry and agreement. I have never known how to recover this money, in spite of my entreaties, from Monsieur Bonnefoy, his grandson and sole heir, against whom I did not wish to take proceedings up to this time, and I still entreat my son to settle this affair as quietly as possible.

¹⁸Michel Le Gras had already spent several years at the Collège de Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet (*Correspondence*, 2:13, n. 8).

¹⁹Antoine Le Gras.

²⁰The Marillacs were from Auvergne. Louise's recommendation "to honor always the Marillacs" refers especially to the infants and children of Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seals (Coste, *Life*, 182).

²¹The Count de Maure was the husband of Anne d'Attichy, cousin of Louise de Marillac (*Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac: Correspondence and Thoughts*, ed. Louise Sullivan, D.C., [Albany: 1991], 308).

I remember that, immediately after the death of Monsieur Le Gras, Monsieur Gachier told me he wished to pay the sum and started by sending me one hundred livres or more, which I do not remember to have receipted to his credit.²²

I give and bequeath ten crowns of this money mentioned in the last article, whenever it shall be received, to the deserving poor of the town of Montferrand.²³

I bequeath thirty livres a year in perpetuity, after the death of my son, to the venerable Priests of the Mission, first established with the blessing of God by Monsieur Vincent, in the Collège des Bons-Enfants, near the gate of Saint-Victor, on condition that they shall have three low masses said every year, namely, one on the first day of the year, the second on the feast of All Saints, and the third on the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin. These masses to be said at Saint Paul's and in the chapel of Saint-Amable.²⁴ This obligation was imposed on me at the death of my father, and I have the power to dispose of it at my death; this power of disposal being given me by Monsieur de Marillac, deceased, former Keeper of the Seals. These aforesaid gentleman of the Mission shall, moreover, be obliged to give in alms, on each day of the celebration of said masses, five *sous* to the work, five to the poor; and also two tapers, weighing one pound, to be burned All Souls' Day during the holy mass said in the above-named chapel, and then given to the work.

They shall, besides, feel bound to say three low masses, one on Saint Thomas's day,²⁵ before Christmas--the anniversary of my deceased husband--and the other two on the anniversary of my death and that of my son. And this to honor the moment our Savior died on the cross, that the merit of this perpetual divine sacrifice may be applied to those who are in the agonies of death, and those in mortal sin to obtain from the mercy of God an efficacious grace to convert them.

I leave eighteen livres to my confessor at the parish where I shall die, in gratitude for all the trouble his charity has taken with me, and

²²Louise added this paragraph in the margin and signed: "Marillac."

²³Antoine Le Gras was originally from Montferrand in Auvergne. It now forms part of the town of Clermont-Ferrand.

²⁴The chapel of Saint-Amable in Saint Paul's parish is where Michel de Marillac and Antoine Le Gras are buried (*La Compagnie des Filles de la Charite Aux Origines. Documents*, Elizabeth Charpy, D.C., ed. [Paris:1989],994).

²⁵21 December.

I wish him to employ that sum on any books or things useful to himself.

I gave six crowns to my goddaughter, who is also the goddaughter of my son, Anne-Louise Metais, to be employed by her in presents when she shall be capable of doing so, and I recommend her to my son, in case her mother should die before she is either married or becomes a religious or is of an age to take care of herself.

I give one crown to each of the confraternities here named, in which I have had the honor of being received, asking pardon of God for my many failings as regards the devotions prescribed by said confraternities, which leads me to realize that it would be better to be enrolled in a few and be faithful to them. The places where I have the honor to be enrolled are at Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, for the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament; at the Jacobins, for the Confraternity of the Five Wounds of our Lord; at the Cordeliers of the Great Convent, for the Cord of Saint Francis; at the Jacobins of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, for the rosary; at the Augustinians of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, for the Cincture of Saint Monica; and at Saint-Laurent, for association to the Company of the Blessed Sacrament.

I give six crowns a year to the Daughters of Charity--my dear sisters with whom I have had the honor of living for the last several years--of which eighteen livres shall be for ingredients to prepare ointments for the poor who come to their house. I declare that I should be obliged to do a great deal for them if God had given me the means to do so. Therefore, I beg my son to be always grateful for the charity they have shown me and to consider it a special blessing if he ever has occasion to be employed for them--in which I exhort him from my heart not to fail.

I give and bequeath ten crowns to be distributed to the beggars on the first Sunday or feast day after my death, after a sermon given them by some charitable person, who will do this for the love of God, in the church of Saint-Laurent,²⁶ or in the chapel, or rather at Saint-Lazare, if this be possible. I beg the preacher, in the name of our Lord, to speak only for the poor, teaching them their obligation to know God; who are the good and the wicked among the poor; how advantageous their condition would be for their salvation, if they use it well; what they should do to prevent themselves from being brought to begging; with

²⁶The motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity was located in the parish of Saint-Laurent.

what humility they should ask an alms; their obligation to serve God and hear mass on Sundays and feasts; have them resolve to kneel in prayer morning and evening, and do it for the glory of God and the good of those souls who are lost for want of knowing the obligations for their state.

I leave one crown every year in perpetuity to the Daughters of Charity, my dear sisters, to begin the year of my decease, on condition that one of them will say, every year, five rosaries for my son, namely, on the Presentation of the Holy Virgin, her Immaculate Conception, the third Friday of February, Good Friday and the Friday of Ember Days and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, between the hours of seven and eight, on the aforesaid days, to obtain from God a particular grace for those who receive holy orders.

After my debts and legacies are paid, my son, as sole heir, shall enjoy my property. After his death, all I leave will pass to the poor, whom I constitute my heirs after him. In case he marries and has children, he and his children will enjoy it according to the law regulating substituted successions, but I intend and will that, should he have no legitimate offspring, the poor shall enjoy the little that God has given me, and for this purpose I humbly supplicate Monsieur Vincent de Paul, Founder and General of the Priests of the Mission, and after him his successors, to look after this disposition, so that should the substitution take place, they may collect the revenues and make the annual distribution, since I know that their principal duty is to labor for the salvation of the poor, for which I would willingly sacrifice my life.

But in case that God gives the blessing of a firm establishment to the Company of Sisters of Charity in the parishes or if they can subsist as they have done for several years, remaining under the direction of the above named gentlemen of the Mission, my intention and last will is, that, with the exception of one hundred livres which these same gentlemen of the Mission will enjoy, the Sisters of Charity inherit, according to the above terms, the little that I leave, and thus they may have more means to assist the sick poor in the country places where they find less aid. I pray the goodness of God, should he please to give any merit to this disposition, to apply it as a means to bring down his mercy (of which we have great need) on the soul of my son and on my own soul at the moment of death.

I very humbly beg Monsieur Vincent, by the charity God has given him for his neighbors and by the love he bears the sacred

humanity of our Redeemer, to pardon me all my failures in showing gratitude for the honor he has done me in exercising so much charity towards my son and myself, for which I thank him with all my heart and beg him to continue his holy affection for my son, to be to him a father, giving him good counsel and aid in all his needs. I also ask him to grant the prayer which for the love of God I make him, and his successors should God call him away before me, of being the executor of my will with my son, to whom I have proposed this substitution.²⁷ In return for their charity on this point I promise, should God be pleased to show me mercy and permit me to enter his paradise, to do for them all that a soul can do.

I commit and willingly abandon my soul into the hands of God, its creator and last end, and freely leave my body to the earth to await the resurrection. As to the place of my burial, I leave it entirely under the disposition of divine providence, to the care of Monsieur Vincent, whom I beg to remember the great desire I have testified to be buried alongside the wall at the foot of the church of Saint-Lazare, in the little court which, from bones found there, appears to have been once a cemetery. I still greatly desire to be buried there, and I ask it of his charity for the love of God. I also ask that there be placed as soon as possible against the wall in the same place a large wooden cross with crucifix attached, and an inscription at its foot bearing this title: "Spes Unica." The whole to be at the expense of the little I leave and which God has given me to dispose in this my will.

For my funeral I declare that I do not wish any greater expense to be incurred than what is usual in the funerals of our deceased sisters. Anyone wishing to do differently never really cared much for me, because it is not right that my poor body should be given such attention since I so often offended God and my neighbor. Moreover, this would be to pronounce me undeserving to appear as having died a true Sister of Charity and servant of the members of Jesus Christ, although, nevertheless, I am unworthy of that quality.

Behold, O my God, your poor creature, prostrate at the feet of your grandeur and majesty! Acknowledging herself a criminal and deserving of hell, to which your strict justice would have condemned me, were it not for the immense love which made your son become

²⁷In the margin, Louise had added: "the substitution that I made in this will, a little while before his marriage, in the room of the Daughters who serve the meal to the poor of the Hôtel-Dieu, and he agreed to it." Louise de Marillac.

man to deliver me. May it please your divine majesty that I, with my son, be among the number of those who through your son will eternally glorify you! Deign to look kindly on the acts, desires, and dispositions made in this will, drawn up in the belief that such is your divine will, which has always directed mine, and without which I protest with all my strength never to will anything, and in which, I affirm, I wish to terminate my life, as I have this writing, which I have done and signed with my own hand, this Friday, the fifteenth day of December, 1645.

Louise de Marillac,
By the grace of God sound of body and mind.

Codicil: 28 December 1653

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This day, feast of Holy Innocents, in the year 1653, I have reviewed my will, which I believe to be made in the best form in my power to bring about the best results. Accordingly, I confirm it and approve of all its articles and in as much as there has been a change in my son whom divine providence has destined for marriage and that by his contract I have given him 500 livres annual income, arranged in diverse deeds which have placed in his hands, and being assured by his own word, shortly before his marriage, that he will have no need of my little income--that it will be doing no wrong to him or his children if he does not receive it--I think I am bound in conscience to declare what follows as my desire in the execution of my will, desiring with all my heart that if God gives it any merit, his goodness may apply it for the salvation of all the family and to draw mercy on my poor soul.

First, as the gentlemen of the Mission shall not be obliged to have the masses mentioned in my will said until after the death of my son, he shall enjoy the thirty livres set apart for this purpose, which shall be collected from the rent for the city house which I reserve to myself. From this revenue also shall be taken all the other legacies which I have made, excepting the ten crowns of the money due to me in Auvergne.

Should it happen, unfortunately, that this revenue be lost and that no recourse can be had to the property of Madame de Vandy²⁸ who

²⁸Innocente de Marillac, half-sister of Louise de Marillac. She was the daughter of Louis de Marillac and his second wife Antoinette Le Camus (Coste, *Life*, 11:178).

sold it to me in exchange for revenue which she owed me on her property, I pray my son still to execute this my will, in consideration of all that he knows I have done for him, remembering that by the account rendered to him after the death of his father, my good husband (whom may God have in his mercy!) he is indebted to me I think 4,000 livres. God is my witness that I do this act in the belief that I am obliged to do so and not for the purpose of having the masses celebrated, in case the revenue be entirely lost, because this fund was assigned for that purpose.

In consequence of this present declaration the deed of that revenue will remain in the hands of the Priests of the Mission, who will enjoy the remainder of the income, if there be any, conjointly with the Sisters of Charity. I beg them all to ask for mercy on me.

The said deed will be found, with the account above mentioned, in the drawer of my cabinet from Germany, which I beg Monsieur Vincent to give to my son, together with the other few pieces of our furniture, of which he will find a memorandum, if it please God. You know, O my God, that I am wholly yours, that your providence has been, by divine grace, the guide of my conduct in every state of life, for which I humbly thank you, asking pardon now for all my forgetfulness and ingratitude. I offer you this little disposition, as made by your will, renouncing every other consideration. I beg you by the love of Jesus crucified to give your blessing to me, also to my son and his family, that we may glorify you eternally.

Made and signed this day and year mentioned.

Louise de Marillac.

Codicil: 11 May 1656²⁹

This day, Thursday, being the eleventh of May, four hours from sunrise, in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-six, at the command of the lady Louise de Marillac,³⁰ widow of Antoine Le Gras, deceased, who, while living, was equerry³¹ to the late queen, Marie de

²⁹The notaries who transcribed this codicil (1656), dictated by Louise, wrote it in the third person.

³⁰At the beginning of May (1656), Louise had been gravely ill; she died 15 March 1660 (Elizabeth Charpy, D. C., "Louise de Marillac: Come Wind or High Water—[In the Evening of her Life," *Echo of the Company* (1988):317-24).

³¹Calvet describes Antoine Le Gras as "Secretary of the Household to the Queen, Marie de Médicis, a sufficiently minor official, but with a future more than promising" (Jean Calvet, *Louise de Marillac*, trans. G.F. Pullen [London: 1959], 30).

Médicis, the undersigned notaries were brought to the house where the lady lived, in the Faubourg Saint-Denis, opposite the church of Saint-Lazare, where they found her in bed, sick in body, although sound in mind, memory, and understanding, as appeared by her words and manner: who said and declared that she had made her will, written entirely by herself on the fifteenth of December, one thousand six hundred and forty-five, also a codicil written by herself on the day of Holy Innocents of the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-three. Having read the will and codicil during her sickness, she wished to make a new codicil and for this end dictated and named to said notaries as follows:

Having reason to be satisfied with the conduct of Michel Antoine Le Gras, equerry, her only son, bailiff in Saint-Lazare and counselor in the Court of Exchange, and with the young lady Le Clerc, his wife, on account of the respect and tokens of affection which she had received from her since their marriage; being assured that, should said son die without children, his goods and those he might have from said lady, his mother, would be used for the benefit of the poor, she therefore has revoked and does revoke the substitution which she made of her property by aforesaid will for the benefit of the poor, wishing that her son above named enjoy the same and freely dispose of it as he pleases. She wills and ordains, according to said will and codicil, that the revenue which belonged to her on the city house be for the benefit of the gentlemen of the Mission, to whom she has made abundant legacies and gifts on the conditions named by said will and codicils, and that they commence to receive them and accomplish the conditions prescribed on the day of the decease of her son. Moreover, to give on the first dividend received, thirty livres for the poor of Saint-Laurent, her parish, and eighteen livres for the legacies which she had made by her will to her confessor, and still another eighteen livres to her granddaughter,³² the daughter of the above named son, during her life, to be employed in giving dinner to the poor of the parish in which she may live: at which dinner she will serve the poor guests.

Wishing, moreover, the said will and codicils to be executed and begging Monsieur Vincent to be, with said son, executor of the present codicil.

³²Louise Renée Le Gras, born in 1651, became by marriage Mademoiselle d'Ormilley. She died childless ("Genealogy of the de Marillac Family," *Spiritual Writings*, 858).

This was thus made, said, and named by the said lady, Le Gras, to said notaries, and being reread to her by one of the same, the other being present, she has pronounced it to be well understood, in the said house where she was living, in a little room on the first floor, where she was in bed sick, on the same day and year, and she signed thus:

Louise de Marillac.

Le Garon et Galois, Notaries.

