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Introduction

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PREFACE (FRENCH EDITION)

The Bible is Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ announced; Jesus Christ revealed; Jesus Christ communicated. The better we know Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament, the more we will deepen our understanding of Our Savior. By means of this reading and meditation we become filled, little by little, with His personality and with His Spirit.

The same may be said of the saints who are the "friends of God." By revealing to us their experience of God, their writings bring to light their human and supernatural gifts and permit us to follow them on their journey toward God.

Therefore, it is a great grace for us, the Sons and Daughters of Saint Vincent, who have received so many letters and conferences of our Holy Founder, to possess also a large part of the correspondence of Saint Louise de Marillac, as well as her diverse spiritual writings. All this constitutes a veritable family treasure.

However, if, in the case of Saint Vincent, this treasure has been and continues to be well used, the same is not true for Saint Louise. It is only very recently that her work has been unearthed from the dust of three centuries. This discovery has already produced a few biographies and studies of great value. It is now a pressing invitation to as many Daughters of Charity as possible to become familiar with the personal writing of their Foundress.

What a wonderful undertaking it was to produce this new edition of the correspondence, the meditations, and the advices of all kinds which she has left us. Indeed, we are discovering, more and more, not only how inseparable she is from Saint Vincent, from whom she received so much, but also the great importance of her own contributions. After a somewhat difficult and uncertain beginning, their collaboration became one of the most marvelous and fruitful witnesses to complementarity between a man and a woman, between a male and a female saint who placed all the resources of their widely divergent personalities at the service of the same ideal.

Nothing is more instructive in this regard than the two conferences of July 3 and July 24, 1660 on the virtues of Louise de Marillac. How moving it is to see Monsieur Vincent, just a few weeks before his own death, thank Our Lord for having preserved him until that moment and express his wonder as the sisters relate their recollections of their Foundress. It is interesting to see him stress certain qualities which he judged characteristic of the person of Mademoiselle Le Gras and particularly important in the vocation of the Daughters of Charity: supernatural prudence, the

spirit and practice of poverty, the interior life, humility, gentleness, and above all, love of God and of the Poor.

“Father,” said one sister, “I can say nothing else than that the life of Mademoiselle Le Gras is a mirror in which we have only to gaze.”

This sentence sums up everything and invites us to find even greater joy in the appearance of this new edition of the writings of Saint Louise during this 350th anniversary year of the birth of the Company. The preceding edition, which we generally referred to as the “Gray Book,” came out in 1960 to mark the 300th anniversary of the death of our Founders. It rendered great service as my predecessor, Father Slattery, hoped it would. In the letter that he wrote as a Preface for that edition, he said, “You can but rejoice at seeing an attractive personality of your Holy Mother emerge from the shadows in which her humility had hidden her. But above all, you want those who will know her better in the future, and who esteem her so highly, to find her in those who have the honor of being her Daughters. It is in her writings as well as in those of Saint Vincent that you will find the most perfect expression of your spirit.”

For my part, therefore, I wish, with all my heart, that this new edition, in which they have tried to record with greater fidelity the exact words of Saint Louise, be for all the Daughters of Charity a guide for an evermore efficacious service of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of our Lords and Masters, the Poor. By reading it and by meditating on it often, especially during your retreats, you will understand in a very practical way what Monsieur Vincent said of Louise de Marillac in the Conferences mentioned above: “You did not make yourselves, Sisters; it was she who made you and gave birth to you in Our Lord.”

*Richard McCullen, C.M.
Superior General*

INTRODUCTION (FRENCH EDITION)

At the end of the nineteenth century the numerous autographs of Louise de Marillac were classified and carefully regrouped in large bound collections by Sister Goeffre.

Collection Number One regroups 256 letters from St. Vincent to St. Louise, letters that Monsieur Coste has published in his immense work of fourteen volumes. This collection also contains five other documents: the account of the journey to Nantes, the regulations for Le Mans, and a letter to Brother Ducourneau.

Collection Number Two contains 187 letters written by Louise de Marillac to Monsieur Vincent, and thirty-four letters sent to various people: Priests of the Mission, Ladies of Charity, etc.

Collection Number Three includes the manuscripts of the 329 letters destined for the Daughters of Charity. A certain number of these letters were written by secretaries (especially Élisabeth Hellot and Mathurine Guérin), but they are signed by Saint Louise herself.

Collection Number Four groups the ninety-nine letters that were preciously preserved by the Abbé de Vaux, Vicar General of Angers.

Collection Number Five assembles the other writings of Louise de Marillac: retreats, meditations, diverse thoughts, regulations, conferences

...

Two other collections, called the Notebooks of Marguerite Chétif, present copies made either by herself or one of the first sisters of autographs handwritten by the Foundress. Marguerite Chétif, named Superioress General by Monsieur Vincent in August, 1660, had asked Mathurine Guérin, Louise de Marillac's secretary for seven years, to send her a collection of Louise's principal virtues so that she might follow the Foundress's example in her role of authority.

Mathurine Guérin responds simply: "When I had the happiness of writing her letters, I did not consider them beautiful teachings at the time. However, now I admire the diversity she gave to them. In some, she instills the observance of the Rule, in others fear; in all of them the pure love of God.

"One of the greatest benefits of our Company is the most exact collection that she made and had made of the instructions of our late Most Honored Father. You could say that I am not teaching you anything new since you are just as aware of it as the others; but perhaps they all do not know the charity with which she urged the sisters charged with this work so that they would not fail . . .

"She often said that a day would come when our dear sisters would be comforted in having the writings of persons that we had had the good fortune of knowing.

"It would take quite a long time if I wanted to specify each of her charitable traits as manifested by the letters which she herself wrote or had written to each sister in particular and to the sisters in general, had they been kept together. What I could tell you would truly be another instruction for you, my dear Sister. As for me, I have several of them that I keep as relics of her spirit. Nevertheless, if I were commanded to reveal them, I would deny myself these benefits . . ."

In order to preserve the spirit of Louise de Marillac, Marguerite Chétif not only read and meditated upon the letters, but she recopied them in order to transmit the message to all the Daughters of Charity, for whom she was assuming the responsibility.

The copies contain no names of sisters and cities. Anonymity had to be preserved because several of the Daughters of Charity to whom these letters had been addressed were still living. Thanks to research work undertaken in the last few years at the Archives of the Motherhouse, it was possible to identify several copies with the autographs of Collection Number Three. The letters have been recopied according to their origin from this sister or that house. A series of letters comes from the house of Angers, another from Barbe Angiboust, Anne Hardimont, Laurence Dubois, etc. Several copies could not be identified.

For this new publication, a trial method of chronological classifications has been undertaken. The documents without dates are numerous, but by comparing them with the dated letters found in the work of Coste, along with the letters received by Louise de Marillac from the Daughters of Charity, the Vincentians and the Administrators, it was possible to date precisely a great number of them. The appearance of the autograph (writing, type of paper) also permits a certain approximation of the period in which the document was written.

When Sister Goeffre classified the different autographs, she assigned to each one a classification number. This number has been faithfully preserved. The letter "L" preceding a number indicates articles of correspondence; the letter "A" indicates diverse thoughts and regulations; the letter "S" indicates documents classified later. The letter "M" designates the copies made by Marguerite Chétif.

This edition presents numerous differences from prior publications because it seemed opportune to return to the complete text of the letters and different writings of Louise de Marillac without regrouping them by themes and without modifying the Seventeenth Century French.

Dates in brackets were written on the back of autographs by Brother Ducourneau, Monsieur Vincent's secretary. Dates or other entries in parentheses were determined by taking into account events transpiring in the Company of the Daughters of Charity or in the Congregation of the Mission at a given period.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The first edition of the *Écrits de Louise de Marillac* was published in 1960. In 1972, an English Language translation by Sister Helen Marie Law, D.C. of the *Letters of Louise de Marillac* appeared. After extensive research, a new French edition entitled *Louise de Marillac: Écrits Spirituels* was published in 1983. As the Editors stated in their Introduction, "this edition presents numerous differences from prior publications." A "trail method of chronological classification" was undertaken and there was a "return to the complete text of the letters and different writings of Louise de Marillac without regrouping them by themes and without modifying the Seventeenth Century French."

In order to present the English Language reader with the texts for which no previous translation existed, the portion of the 1983 French Edition entitled "Thoughts" was published in English in 1984 as *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*. Nevertheless, it was deemed advisable, given the extensive revisions in the correspondence, to translate the entire volume. Thus, the present English Language text, *Louise de Marillac: Spiritual Writings: Correspondence-Thoughts*, is a translation of the integral 1983 French Edition and includes the 1984 English Language translation of the Thoughts. It therefore replaces all previous translations of the different writings of Louise de Marillac.

The primary goal of any translation is fidelity to the original text. Insofar as humanly possible, that has been attempted here. The reader's attention, however, is called to the following points:

1. the spelling of proper names was not fixed in Seventeenth Century French. Louise de Marillac sometimes spells the same person's name in more than one way (Magdelene vs. Madeleine Mongert). These have been standardized throughout the text to avoid confusion.

2. the "trail method of chronological classification" has given rise to some discrepancies in dates, names or addresses as they appear in the body of the text and as they are found in the Numerical Listing, Table of Contents, Footnotes or Index. These have all been brought into agreement with the body of the text unless other factors indicated another choice.

3. the Index is a translation of the French Index and concepts are indexed as they were classified by the French Editors. In some instances an entry includes both the mention of the concept by Louise de Marillac and texts which illustrate her practice of it (Condescension). Entries which have more than one heading in French (Décès—Mort) but are translated by the same English word (Death) are combined. Place subheadings are frequently repeated in the French text. These are combined in English (Barbe Angiboust-Paris). Entries which could not be verified have been eliminated.

The 1983 French Edition represents an extensive, painstaking work of research. This English Language translation hopes to present the same faithful portrait of Louise de Marillac during this Fourth-Centenary year of her birth.

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