

*Friend  
of the  
Spirit*



A short biography of  
**FR MARIE-EUGENE OF THE CHILD JESUS**  
*Carmelite*

# *Friend of the Spirit*

A short biography of  
**FR MARIE-EUGENE OF THE CHILD JESUS**  
*Carmelite*

Josefina P. Dejoras

## **N**ote to the Reader

This is a brief biography of Henri Grialou, who later became Fr. Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, a Carmelite priest. It is presented in short sketches or vignettes that trace the important events in his life.

Towards the end of his life, Fr. Marie-Eugene told his children, the members of Notre Dame de Vie Institute: "I do not want to talk about my life, but you know me, and you will be the ones to talk about me, if it is necessary."

Fr. Marie-Eugene is the author of *I Want to See God* - *I am a Daughter of the Church*, a spiritual masterpiece which is a synthesis of the teachings of the Carmelite Masters and Doctors of spiritual life: Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Therese of the Child Jesus. It has sold more than 100,000 copies in six languages.

Obviously, these sketches do not capture all the richness of the life of this holy man whose Cause for Beatification was opened in the Archdiocese of Avignon in 1985, eighteen years after he died. Until a more complete biography is published, it is the members of Notre Dame de Vie Institute, the direct beneficiaries of the teachings of their Founder and Father, who can share with others the treasures of which they are the depositaries. These treasures are for all, and all those who share the spirituality that Father Marie-Eugene speaks about and lived his whole life are invited to draw from the same sources.

This booklet was written on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the existence of Notre Dame de Vie Institute in the Philippines.

J. P. Dejoras  
Notre Dame de Vie Institute  
Encanto, Bulacan February 4, 2005

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# ALONG THE STREAM OF HIS LIFE

1	A Young Boy's Dream	1
2	Henri's Family	2
3	The First Sacrifice	3
4	Studies in Susa	5
5	In the Seminary of Graves	6
6	The First World War	7
7	The Major Seminary	9
8	Friendship with Carmel	10
9	A Sudden Illumination	12
10	Painful Dilemma	13
11	Poignant Opposition	15
12	Priesthood: Fulfillment of the Dream	16
13	The Price of the Call	18
14	The Carmelite Spirit	19
15	Reconciliation with Mother	21
16	Glorification of Therese of Lisieux	22
17	Discovery of God as Love	24
18	The Petit Castelet	26
19	The "First Three"	27

20	Distant Preparations	29
21	Work and Prayer	30
22	The Year 1932	31
23	Separation: Test of Faith	33
24	"I Want to See God"	34
25	The Philippine Foundation	36
26	Emerentiana	37
27	Model of the Contemplative Apostle in the Modern World	40
28	Twenty-fifth Anniversary: Feast of Our Lady of Life	41
29	Father Marie-Eugene Resides in Notre Dame de Vie	43
30	The Holy Spirit: The Future of the Institute	45
31	Towards the "Embrace of the Holy Spirit"	46
32	"Traditus Gratiae Dei"	47



PLAYING WITH  
FATHER MARIE-EUGENE

51 - 59



*“Leave your country, your kindred,  
and your father’s house  
for a country which I shall show you,  
and I shall make you a great nation.  
I shall bless you  
and make your name famous:  
you are to be a blessing!”*

*Gen 12, 1-2*

## ALONG THE STREAM OF HIS LIFE

### a young boy’s dream

### 1

One late afternoon, Henri was trotting down the winding road leading from his school up on the hill to his home. His home was in the valley along the only big road that cut through the town of Le Gua, where his family lived. On the way down, he passed in front of the rectory, and that afternoon he stopped and sat down on the low wall that separated the rectory from the winding road. He was deep in thought while looking at the rectory. He muttered to himself what he had been pondering in his heart, “One day, I will be a priest!” Henri was ten years old.

The boy could either take the winding road to go from home to school and back, or else take the steep stone staircase of more than eighty steps a few meters from the road. Like any boy his age, he loved to run up the staircase sometimes, taking two steps at a time; at times he would compete with some classmates who were taking the winding road. On some occasions he would win; at other times, his friends would touch the finish line earlier.

There were days when he would go up the hill early. He would pass by the church, which was just beside his school and was run by the De La Salle Brothers. He loved to pray there and sometimes to serve at Mass. The parish priest had noticed him several times and one day told him that he should become a priest. The desire to become a priest grew in the heart of the young boy until one day he could no longer keep it from his mother. "Mama, I want to become a priest," he told her. His mother became sad.

Henri came from a modest family, and his mother could not pay for his studies at the seminary.

## 2      HENRI'S FAMILY

Auguste Grialou and Marie Miral were both from Valzergues, a small village in Aveyron in southern France. To find work after their marriage, the young couple moved to a neighboring town, where Mr. Grialou became a miner in the coalmines of Le Gua. They were soon blessed with five children: Marius, Angèle, Henri, Fernande and Berthe. Henri was his mother's favorite. Mrs. Grialou did odd jobs in order to help her husband support their family and to be able to enlarge their house; she also managed a little restaurant.

In spite of their modest means, Henri's parents saw to it that their children did not lack the essentials of life. When Mr. Grialou's work allowed it, the whole family would go out to the countryside for a picnic. That was a good occasion for the children to breathe fresh air. Sometimes on weekends, Auguste and Marie would allow

their children to go back to Valzergues on foot, across the mountain and passing by the fields. Such outings were a respite from life in the mining town.

One day in August 1904, the family went on a picnic. The children, as usual, enjoyed themselves. In the afternoon, Mr. Grialou felt cold, which was unusual on such a hot summer day. The family returned home quickly, and Mr. Grialou took to his bed. Little did the family suspect that this event would change their life drastically. Three days later, Mr. Grialou succumbed to the sickness, leaving his wife with five children to rear and educate. Suffering entered the family life.

Mrs. Marie Miral Grialou was a valiant, robust woman. She did not give in to despondency but rather mustered the courage to look after her family single-handedly. She accepted different kinds of odd jobs, even laundry work at the hospital and for other families in the town.

## 3      THE FIRST SACRIFICE

One day, in June 1905, two priests of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit visited Henri's school and went from one class to another, accompanied by the parish priest. Henri's heart thrilled with enthusiasm when he heard one of the priests say that they were offering free schooling to the boys who were interested in studying for the priesthood. These boys would have to go to Susa in northern Italy, where the seminary was. Henri was disheartened when he learned that because it meant that

he would have to leave his mother and go so far away. But he heard the parish priest say to the visitor, "Henri Grialou is interested." Henri's face then lit up: this could be the beginning of the fulfillment of his dream! And his beloved mother would not have to work hard for it.

He held on to the good news that he was bringing his mother as he ran down the winding road toward his home. She was at the door to welcome him, and he could hardly wait to break the wonderful news to her.

But Mrs. Grialou's face fell when she heard the news. At the same time, as a mother she fathomed in her heart the inner excitement that this offer of free studies brought to her son — studies that would help him fulfill his deepest desire. Her sensibility was divided; after all, she and Henri would both have to endure the long years of separation. In 1905, people did not easily go on trips, especially not abroad. And Henri was so young.

However, the decision had to be made. Mrs. Grialou gave in to the filial insistence and encouragements of her son. She wept silently as she prepared all the things he would need for the long stay at the seminary. She arranged them very neatly in his suitcase.

Henri's heart, too, ached at the thought of the separation, but to fulfill his heart's desire, he was ready to make this great sacrifice.

## studies in susa

The seminary was in the high mountains of Susa. The young boys submitted themselves eagerly to the discipline of the seminary formation and schedule. Winters were severe, but as soon as they could go on long hikes at the beginning of spring, the whole class would sometimes spend a whole day in the open air. Henri loved those long walks and outdoor activities. Later, after many years in the priesthood, he would reminisce about those days with glee in his eyes.

Henri was the "foreigner" in his class. Although his classmates made fun of his surname, making him appear like a "stupid one," he did not seem to mind very much. He had a joyful character; he knew how to laugh and make others laugh. And his whole being was set on his goal.

He studied very seriously and at the end of the school year garnered the academic prizes. His classmates' attitude toward him changed, and they began to look at him with the highest respect and to recognize him as a leader in the class. The priest professors began earnestly to take an interest in him. He could be, they thought, a very good priest of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Henri felt that he was being tutored in that direction. They trusted him so much that, after two years, he was sent to the Congregation's school in Langogne, France, hoping that he could help restore the good spirit among the students there. At the end of that year, however, Henri felt certain that he

was not made to be a priest of the Holy Spirit. After a long interior struggle and with the help of his spiritual director, he was finally liberated. Thus, his three years of separation from his family, during which he did not make any home visit, finally ended. The Congregation of the Holy Spirit was sorry to see him go.

His seminary training had to be interrupted. Now the burden was on his mother, who could not afford it. She turned to Monsignor de Ligonnes, Bishop of Rodez for help. The bishop "adopted" Henri and sent him to the minor seminary of Graves.

## 5 IN THE SEMINARY OF GRAVES

Henri spent the years 1909 to 1911 in the seminary of Graves. Between 1908 and 1909, when he was about fourteen years old, he was introduced to a little book titled *La Rose Effeuillée* (The Unpetalled Rose), a short biography of Sister Therese of the Child Jesus, a Carmelite nun who died in the Carmel of Lisieux at the young age of twenty-four. Henri immediately found this book very inspiring. He sensed a certain deep consonance between the spirituality of that unknown young nun and his own. He began talking about her to his fellow seminarians, lending them his copy of the abridged biography or obtaining copies for them. Together with a few fervent seminarians, he organized a study-prayer group, taking the spirituality of Sister Therese as their guide and inspiration.

Henri already knew the Carmel of Villefranche but he became interested to know more about the Carmelite doctrine. He felt drawn to its spirituality of prayer in the ordinary conditions of life. His prayer life was becoming gradually manifest even in the seminary. He was praying to Sister Therese. The abridged edition of the story of her life became his constant companion, and he enthusiastically shared his insights with his friends.

In the seminary, Henri was conspicuous not only for his strong prayer life; he was also a leader, as he had been at Susa. During the winter season, the seminary was not heated. The seminarians had to find a way to help themselves. Henri was not the last one to imagine a solution to the problem. Because he came from the mining town of Le Gua, he knew the usefulness of coal. With the help of some generous benefactors whom he knew, the seminary began to enjoy more comfortable winters.

In 1913, Henri finished his philosophy studies. Many, many years afterwards, some aged priests could still vividly remember those happy days with Henri Grialou in the seminary of Graves.

## the first world war

## 6

The following year, the First World War broke out. All able-bodied Frenchmen were drafted into the Army, including seminarians and priests who were assigned to the front line. The French Revolution in 1789

had exposed the State's hostility towards the Church in France. At that time, there was a strong anticlericalism of the ruling political parties and of some influential people in the French society. This resulted in the State's persecution of the Church. In 1905, priests and religious were exiled from France, but were later called back in order to serve as soldiers during the war.

Henri was among those drafted, and he became Sergeant Grialou. Throughout the war, he constantly carried in his breast pocket his copy of *La Rose Effeuillée*; he said that Sister Therese was deflecting the bullets. Not one of the soldiers in his battalion was lost and he attributed their safety to her. He alone was hit, sustaining a wound on his left cheek. He had to be hospitalized, but after several weeks he became eager to rejoin his men in the battlefield. The war dragged on for five long years; Henri called it a "savage war" which took the life of so many of his co-seminarians. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. He fought in different theaters of war: Argonne, Verdun, Chemin des Dames, Flanders, Champagne. And everywhere, Sister Therese was protecting him. Word spread in the military camp that Lieutenant Grialou's men were safe and so some soldiers wanted to be transferred to his company.

After a day of fighting, he and his men would go back to the barracks. At night he would always find some time to spend in prayer and thanksgiving, even if he was ridiculed by other soldiers several times. His tenacity finally silenced them and they began to respect this "seminarian" and to

leave him alone while he was at prayer. They understood where his strength was coming from. In his heart, he was thanking Sr. Therese of the Child Jesus.

Henri was a captain when he was demobilized on August 30, 1919, at the end of the war, after having been awarded the Military Cross and the medal of the Legion of Honor for his bravery.

## the major seminary

## 7

The war had roughhewn the man. Henri's leadership qualities had been put to the test and honed: he proved to be somebody who could lead a big number of people toward a set goal. At the same time his spiritual life had been sharpened and deepened: he realized and was convinced that he could do good only with God's help, with God's own strength. He realized that without prayer – even in the midst of battle when he had to count on his own boldness and layman's knowledge of military tactics – he would have been unable to lead his men in the fight, as he did, and with what valor! The war demanded that of him. Sister Therese taught him how to call on God in the midst of any situation he found himself in, even in the most ordinary circumstances. He would keep this lesson all throughout his life.

Back in Aveyron, Henri was confronted with a dilemma: Was he going to continue his promising career in the military, or would he go back to the seminary? People

had high hopes for him. What he had learned and gained from his experience of war; a military career seemed assured. One night, in a heart-to-heart talk with his brother Marius, Henri affirmed to him, "I want the Absolute!"

Henri prayed over the issue. As usual, in moments of decision, he consulted God. It was God's will alone that mattered to him. What would be the value of success in any endeavor, were it the most brilliant, or were it to bring apparent good to others, if it was not God's will? It would then be pure presumption. Henri's heart was bent on seeking God's plan for him.

The following day, he made his decision. He was certain God wanted him to re-enter the seminary. So he presented himself at the Major Seminary of Rodez: that was where God was waiting for him. "I opted wholeheartedly for the priesthood." There was no place for hesitation. As soon as God had manifested His light, Henri had only to follow it.

## 8 FRIENDSHIP WITH CARMEL

Henri began his theological studies at the age of twenty-five. His classmates were eighteen or nineteen years old. Psychologically, he had to readjust, not without difficulty, to the constraints of seminary studies and

community life. He undertook his theological studies with characteristic intellectual vigor and personal discipline. His maturity on the human and spiritual levels was exercised on many occasions in acts of generosity, availability, and leadership: from his eagerness to help with his bare hands in the construction of the seminary chapel to tutoring some fellow seminarians who needed help and even to organizing prayer sessions in the seminary or taking care of the youth in the parishes where he did weekend pastoral work.

Henri had already been frequenting the Carmel of Villefranche while he was a student at the seminary in Graves. And during the years when he was studying theology, he got in touch with the Carmelite Sisters of Rodez. How did it happen? The prioress, Mother Marie-Eugene, asked Father Belmon, then the director of the seminary, to translate for her the Decree on the Heroicity of the Virtues of Sr. Therese of the Child Jesus in view of her beatification. "I will ask Reverend Grialou to do it," Father Belmon told her. When it was done, he told the prioress, "I could not have done it better." It was thus that Father Belmon sent Reverend Grialou to Mother Marie-Eugene. Thereafter, some seminarians often went to the monastery, especially to celebrate Carmelite feasts. Henri became acquainted with Mother Prioress, whom he considered a great soul, and they became great friends. She would talk to him about Carmel and its doctrine, and lend him books on the lives of Carmelite saints.

Mother Marie-Eugene and Henri mutually benefited from those exchanges. "Jesus gave me the great grace of coming in close relations with true Carmelite nuns who were very much filled with the spirit of the primitive Carmel in all its strength and tenderness."

## 9

## a sudden illumination

To prepare for his subdiaconate, Henri made a retreat. On the night of December 13, 1920, he searched among his books for something that could nourish him during this retreat, and he chanced upon a small book on his shelf, one of those lent to him by the Carmelite prioress, but to which he had not paid any attention because it looked too simple for his taste. It was a brief biography of St. John of the Cross, the young Carmelite friar who became collaborator of St. Teresa of Avila in the reform of Carmel. This time, there was something that seemed to glue Henri's attention to the book. He began reading it, and in no time finished the slender volume. It had on him the effect of a thunderbolt! In his heart he felt certain that he was being called to Carmel. It was an imperative call! He did not know what to think; he had never seen a Carmelite friar; he had been told there was none in France. Later in Carmel, he would learn that December 13 was St. John of the Cross's feast day.

But the certitude was so strong he could hardly wait for the weekly colloquium with his spiritual director so that he could confide it to him. Upon hearing it, Father Belmon blurted out, "You're crazy!" Henri did not expect such a reaction; he felt Father Belmon did not believe him. At the following week's meeting, Henri had to tell him again that the conviction was as strong as ever; he could not take it out of his mind. Finally, the spiritual director forbade Henri to ever mention this thing to him again or even to think about it.

Henri obeyed, but carried in him this weight of the certitude of God's call from which he must now turn away his attention. This very painful situation became even more acute when he learned that Bishop de Ligonnes himself was against it. And yet, he was absolutely sure that God was calling him. However, he submitted himself to the word of his superiors; their voice was the voice of the Church.

## painful dilemma

## 10

How was he going to tell his own mother about it? Henri waited for the opportune time. When Mrs. Grialou learned about it, her response was a violent "no!" How could Henri think of leaving her? What would happen to her long-time dream of serving her son-priest for whom she had sacrificed so much? She had been imagining herself serving him in his presbytery, continuing to be mother to her favorite son for her whole life. And now he was going

to bury himself in a monastery; he would be dead to the world. Mrs. Grialou fell sick with chagrin.

Henri felt caught between two seemingly unconquerable obstacles: on the one hand, his bishop, who had his own plans for this very promising future priest, and on the other, his mother, who vehemently opposed his departure for Carmel. Henri promised her he would not leave without her consent; only then was she pacified, but she continued to resist.

What could he do except to bring this no-win situation to Jesus in prayer? He seemed to be the only one who would listen to him and understand his predicament. But Jesus was silent. Henri was left to himself to bear this contradiction: his absolute certitude of God's call face-to-face with the very clear opposition of his superior and of his mother. It was like Gethsemane. Henri's sole force seemed to come from his recognition of God's light and his obedience to the exterior signs. His faith alone gave him strength.

He continued to see his spiritual director weekly, but he never again mentioned his desire to answer God's call to enter Carmel. Henri had told Jesus that if the call were really God's will, He would have to change his director's mind, but that he himself would no longer insist. At the following colloquium, faced with Henri's silence on the issue, Father Belmon asked him: "What about that vocation? You've not said anything about it anymore?"

Henri was so taken aback by this unexpected turn of events and he was so deeply moved that he became teary-eyed and had to leave the room. Jesus, in fact, was not just silent but working to make the spiritual director recognize the call as coming from God.

### POIGNANT OPPOSITION

11

One day, coming to the Episcopal palace for a meeting, Father Valat, director of the seminary at that time, saw the bishop waiting for him at the top of the stairs. "What is Reverend Grialou doing?" "He submits, Monsignor." "Tell him he can go."

Having prayed about it themselves, Henri's superiors had finally discerned the authenticity of the call that he himself was absolutely sure of. How could he doubt that God was at work in this affair? God had never failed him in the past, even when he had to pass through very difficult and painful dilemmas and long periods of waiting. This call was not Henri's own choosing; God was eminently interested in it. He had a plan for Henri Grialou.

Mrs. Grialou, for her part, continued to oppose Henri's wish to the point of antagonism. Henri did not feel welcome at home anymore. Since he could not talk to his mother, he confided everything to his youngest sister Berthe, making her the intermediary between him and their mother.

Berthe was not only Henri's sister; she was also his goddaughter. When she was born, she was in danger of dying and so had to be baptized immediately. In this emergency case, someone had to substitute for the uncle who had been designated as godfather. The only male person present was Henri, who was only eight years old. By a stroke of providence, therefore, he became Berthe's godfather. The bond uniting Henri and Berthe began to strengthen during this exceedingly tense situation due to Henri's desire to leave for Carmel and his mother's opposition. He not only had to pacify his mother through his letters to Berthe; he also had to allay his sister's own anxiety upon hearing all the negative things being said against her beloved brother.

Henri found strength and peace only in prayer. He was certain Jesus would not abandon him.

## 12

### p r i e s t h o o d : f u l f i l l m e n t o f t h e d r e a m

Henri asked Jesus for a sign that his mother would accept God's will for her son: he wanted his mother to be present at his priestly ordination. He wrote to Berthe so that she and their mother might come for the ordination.

What a joy, therefore, and what a confirmation for Henri to have his mother at his ordination on February 4, 1922! His heart was full of thanksgiving: Jesus was not abandoning him. He offered himself for whatever God had

planned for him, and at whatever cost. To God's absolute call he responded with his absolute gift of self. His hope and his gratefulness knew no bounds.

However, Henri's deepest joy did not remain cloudless for long. The following day, his gift of self was put to the test, a sign that Jesus had taken it seriously, but oh, how it afflicted his human nature! On what was supposed to be a day of great rejoicing – the day of a new priest's first Mass – his mother was conspicuously absent. What had happened? He did not dare inquire from Berthe. He had asked Jesus that his mother might be present at his ordination, and Jesus had granted his desire, but for his first Mass, where was she? Henri's heart shrank with pain and disappointment. He went ahead to offer his first Mass, which turned out to be truly a Sacrifice.

Henri would find out later that Mrs. Grialou had gone to see the bishop to ask him to stop her son from leaving for Carmel. What a loss to the diocese that would be! Bishop de Ligonnes listened to her with great patience and sympathy, seeing how much this departure would break her heart. But he also had to admit to her that she was not the only one losing a son; the bishop, too, was losing a good priest. To console her, the bishop said that Henri could not refuse or delay responding to a call from God that was so clearly manifested. Mrs. Grialou left the bishop's office feeling disconsolate.

Fr. Henri Grialou celebrated thanksgiving Masses in many places, among them in the parish of Bor, where a very close friend of his family was the parish priest. He talked to the people quite simply of his vocation to the priesthood and of his joy in giving himself to God's plan for him—for this alone was what mattered to him. His listeners were greatly edified by his words, but they could not guess in what state of anxiety and suffering he was. His mother had threatened him that if he left for the novitiate of the Carmelite Fathers, she would commit suicide. However, in his heart the decision was made: "My vocation is absolutely certain." And nothing was going to stop him from following God's call. He entrusted to God his mother's fate. He was totally confident that if it was really God's will that he go to Carmel, God would take care of his mother and not allow her to do herself any harm.

From Bor, Henri wrote a very touching letter to his mother. Here are some excerpts: "Let us cry together, but God's will must be accomplished. (...) I myself also have cried at the thought of the sacrifice that I am imposing on you but I cannot resist the will of God so clearly manifested. I leave, therefore, and if I have chosen to do it this way, it is in order to spare you the heartbreaking goodbyes.

God will surely allow us to see each other again here on earth. He will allow you to see the fulfillment of all those beautiful dreams that you were making when I was small. Do you recall those words that you were told before I was born, 'Let him do what he wants to do and do not oppose his desires.' (...) Offer your child to God for the salvation of souls. (...) From time to time, come close to him near Jesus. I ask Him to tell you himself my affection."

Henri's departure for Carmel was made at the price of his mother's life: "I was practically sure Mama was going to commit suicide." At the same time, his trust did not falter. He wrote to Berthe: "Have confidence, Mama is well guarded by her guardian angel and by Sister Therese."

Exactly twenty days after his ordination, on February 24, 1922, Father Grialou left his beloved Aveyron and his mother and all those whom he loved for good, with a heart broken with anxiety but, very surprisingly, in great inner peace. After a short stopover at his sister Angèle's apartment in Paris, he proceeded to Avon, a quiet little town some 100 kms south of Paris, where the Carmelite Fathers' novitiate was. It was the first time he ever met Carmelite Fathers.

Now, he was where God wanted him to be. He was twenty-eight years old when he began his novitiate formation. Fr. Henri Grialou became Fr. Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, a name that he himself had chosen. The

novitiate formation was a kind of formation that was very difficult for this young priest who had come back a captain from war, who knew what it was to be leader of men, a mature man with a vigorous intellect, an energetic will, and strong personal qualities. His faith in the call of God had brought him to Carmel where he wanted to submit himself to all that would be asked of him by the Carmelite Rule, including the ascetical discipline practiced at the time. At the beginning of Henri's religious life, he felt that it was the end of all intellectual life for him. He became a novice and had to follow the conventional regular life; he had to learn how to become a child again. He began to discover the mystery of the Child Jesus. After having posed the strong act of obedience to God's call to enter Carmel, he felt that he was now left to his own strength and there were moments that he understandably felt very low. He did not know what God had in store for him. One day, in his cell, he had a very deep experience of the living presence of the Holy Spirit. Opening the Bible, he fell upon the passage of Genesis: "Look up to the sky and count the stars if you can. Such will be your posterity." This text left a deep impression on him. God made him understand, in faith, that his soul was full of children. But he had, first of all, to be fashioned: "Prayer is, as it were, the sun and center of all the daily occupations (...) It seems one becomes a man of prayer."

Marie-Eugene studied seriously and penetrated the teachings of the Masters of Carmel: St. Teresa of Avila

and St. John of the Cross. Everything nourished his soul in the depths. This was what he had been looking for. What Mother Marie-Eugene had told him became alive and had such great impact in his daily life. The history of Carmel led him to the very source, there to discover the prophetic spirit in the Father of Carmel, the prophet Elijah.

### RECONCILIATION WITH MOTHER

15

During his first year in the novitiate, Marie-Eugene continued to pray fervently for his mother, entrusting her in a special way to Sr. Therese of the Child Jesus. He was convinced in the depth of his soul that God, who had called him to Carmel, was taking care of her in some mysterious way unknown to him. He did not have to comprehend it; it was enough that he believed it was God who was working it out.

The painful estrangement with his mother lasted twenty long months. During all that time Marie-Eugene was writing to her regularly, although he never received any response, and to his sister Berthe, who was living with her. He was communicating to his mother his experiences in the novitiate and sharing with her the spiritual graces he was receiving in Carmel. Mostly, he was expressing to her his love. He kept the lines of communication open, waiting for the day when everything would go back to normal.

The occasion came when, in October 1923, he went back to Rodez to give a series of talks in honor of Blessed Therese of the Child Jesus, who had been beatified in April of that year. Mother and son found each other again and fell into each other's arms, and Henri felt that he "was welcomed with much affection like in olden times." On certain occasions, thereafter, Mrs. Grialou joined pilgrimages to Lourdes with Marie-Eugene and Berthe. Those months of separation were beneficial for both mother and son. The experience was an occasion of purification and healing for Mrs. Grialou who, henceforth, adopted an attitude of supernatural detachment in her relations with her son, now a Carmelite priest. For Marie-Eugene, this profound suffering was the price of the spiritual fruitfulness that God had in store for him. His mother had the joy and the grace to witness the foundation of *Notre Dame de Vie* Institute and to share in its blessings for many years before she died on November 3, 1937 in Paris.

## 16

GLORIFICATION OF  
THERÈSE OF LISIEUX

In fact, on April 29, 1923, one year after Marie-Eugene entered Carmel, Pope Pius XI beatified his long-time friend Sr. Therese of the Child Jesus. What an immense and supernatural joy for Marie-Eugene! He wrote to a friend-priest that same day: "... Perhaps I have prayed for the glorification of the little Sister Therese more than

for any other intention (...) It seems to me that the mission of the little Beatified Sister is the effusion of divine love in souls in the form that God desires for our times."

He was further confirmed in his spirituality when, two years later, Blessed Therese was canonized by the same Pope. At that moment the whole Church was officially encouraged to pray to Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and to follow her Little Way of filial trust and love – the "little royal way" that is open to all.

Marie-Eugene then took it to heart to study the Carmelite doctrine even more intensely. He discovered in the prophet Elijah the double spirit of Carmel: prayer and action. "He is living the Lord in whose presence I stand." (1K 17:1) and "I burn with zeal for the Lord God of Hosts!" (1K 19:10). He studied carefully the doctrine of contemplative prayer, given by St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, which is the way towards living union with God to which all are called – the way to holiness. He realized how much it was necessary that this Carmelite doctrine be known and lived by the nuns in their monasteries. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, the French Carmelite nuns had been put under the jurisdiction of the bishop and, little by little, had been slackening their links with the Carmelite Fathers. The magazine *Carmel*, of which Marie-Eugene became the editor after his novitiate, was the first vehicle for making the Carmelite doctrine reach a wide readership within the Carmelite Order. The different Carmels who were open to this teaching began to nourish themselves with the spiritual food that was, first of all, for them, but which they had been deprived of.

Later, by a decree dated February 23, 1948, Pope Pius XII appointed Marie-Eugene "Apostolic Visitor of the Discalced Carmelite monasteries in France" which resulted in the erection of the Federations of Carmelite monasteries.

Through all these means, he contributed to the very important work of unification of the Order. He also received many invitations to preach on St. Therese of the Child Jesus and on St. John of the Cross, who was proclaimed Doctor of the Church on 24 August 1926. God blessed his efforts.

He realized, likewise, that this spirituality, which is essentially biblical, is addressed to all Christians. But how to make it reach a wider audience? He had to become a Carmelite to discover it, and he was going to make use of all available means to carry out his intuition in time.

## 17

## DISCOVERY OF GOD AS LOVE

As he delved deeper into the teachings of the Masters of Carmel, Marie-Eugene discovered that central to their doctrine is the reality that God is Love. He is a loving God who dwells in the soul as at the center of the castle and it is there that we have to seek Him if we want to be united with Him (Teresa of Avila). We have to take God for a Friend and walk with Him continually. In fact, what more can we want and search for outside since within us we possess our riches – our Beloved whom we desire? (John of the Cross). But alas! He finds few hearts who unconditionally surrender themselves to Him, and who

appreciate the real tenderness of His infinite Love (Therese of the Child Jesus).

Marie-Eugene burned with zeal to share this discovery with all men and women who are thirsty for God or who are willing to run the adventure of love. He felt that the great desire of God is to give Himself and in this He finds joy. But people did not know God as Love. They were more familiar with God who is a Judge, so they were afraid of Him. They, therefore, did not approach Him, thus depriving themselves of His blessings. Marie-Eugene thought that what was most needed was catechesis – teaching people how to know God as He is, to love Him and to serve Him in this world by serving others, as God wants us to do. He wanted to form people who would give themselves totally and unreservedly to God and experience His love in such a way that they can be witnesses of it to others.

Marie-Eugene's discovery of the double spirit of Carmel – prayer and zeal for souls – was illuminated by this truth of God-as-Love. To be a credible and convincing witness of it, one must practice contemplative prayer, that is, spend time with God in order to know Him as a loving Father, and learn to listen and adhere to His will. Only then will one be able to bring others to this friendship with God.

This teaching of the Masters of Carmel which is the backbone of all authentic Carmelite life is at the same time a spirituality that is relevant to any culture and any place where there are baptized who want to live in God's intimacy and who surrender themselves to God who loves them as His children, just as the Father loves His Son

Marie-Eugene shared these insights in his talks and retreats and wrote about them in his articles. This ministry proved to be very successful. He gained the confidence and support of his confreres, who contributed their own articles to the magazine *Carmel* and helped to circulate it even outside the Order.

18

## the petit castelet

Unexpectedly, Marie-Eugene's ministry by the pen and by preaching was cut short by his appointment as director of a school managed by the Carmelite Fathers: the Petit Castelet in Tarascon, southern France. This nomination caused him some disappointment: not only was it going to put a stop to such a good work of making the teachings of the Carmelite saints known far and wide, but it also went contrary to what he was feeling about this school of which he was going to be director. He was not convinced of the purpose of the existence of the school, which trained young boys in view of initiating them to Carmelite life. He did not believe that vocations to Carmel could be fostered in this way. Marie-Eugene was encouraged by some of his Carmelite brothers to refuse the appointment. However, he noticed that the patent was dated 14 August 1928 – it was the vigil of the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady! Deep within him he knew he could not refuse. The Blessed Mother was urging him on... Could this be part of God's plan?

The Petit Castelet was not only a school; it also housed the aged Carmelite Fathers. Marie-Eugene did not take care only of the children and all their needs in the school but also of the old Fathers who were preparing themselves to meet their Creator. He found this task very rewarding.

The school did not thrive for long. God was preparing the way to carry out His plan.

On Pentecost Monday the following year, 19 May 1929, Marie-Eugene had a visit from three ladies, directresses of *Cours Notre Dame de France* in Marseille: Marie Pila, Jeanne Grousset and Germaine Romieu, who were looking for a spiritual guide in their search for the Absolute and in their desire to give themselves completely to it.

Marie-Eugene was interiorly thrilled: "They are the ones!"

the "first three"

19

Marie Pila, Jeanne Grousset and Germaine Romieu had known each other since they were students in Marseille and then in Paris: at that time not many women were pursuing higher university studies. The three were ladies with high ideals – intellectual, social and also spiritual: Marie earned her degree in philosophy, Jeanne in literature and languages, and Germaine in the sciences. They dreamt of putting their knowledge to use by educating girls coming from different milieus in the city of Marseille.

In 1919, they needed much audacity to do that. But they had that audacity, and they fulfilled their dream by opening the very first college for girls in the city: the *Cours Notre Dame de France*. Starting from very small beginnings, their project became progressively more known. Families that had been sending their sons to the neighboring Jesuit school began to send their daughters to the *Cours Notre Dame de France*. The three directresses understood that their desire to work for the education of women was answering a concrete need. But they were not totally satisfied with just giving their students a good intellectual formation; they wanted as well to share with them their spiritual longings, though they did not know how to do so.

Marie Pila already knew the life of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and she had read some of the books of St. John of the Cross that she borrowed from the library of her priest-uncle. The teachings of these Carmelite saints impressed her profoundly because they corresponded to the deep aspirations of her soul. She searched for the person who could guide her spiritually. Jeanne and Germaine shared the same spiritual yearning. Together they went to see the prioress of the Carmel of Beaune to find out if perhaps they had the vocation to Carmel. The prioress could not be certain, so she referred them to a Carmelite Father whom she trusted very much in matters concerning vocation. It was in this way that they were sent to Marie-Eugene who was then prior of the convent of Petit Castelet. He immediately discerned an intense thirst in Marie Pila.

## distant preparations

20

It was a decisive meeting. Marie-Eugene recognized at once these souls whom God had destined for him. But, as he said, it was necessary "to be humble enough to know how to wait for the moment, the way, the hour and the grace of God, instead of rushing to carry out plans which would necessarily be presumptuous because they are our own."

The directresses invited Marie-Eugene to give talks on prayer to a group that had gathered in the *Cours Notre Dame de France* and included some philosophers from the Faculty of Aix-en-Provence, a university city not far from Marseille. He waited two years before accepting. He would write later: "These contacts with the audience quickly showed that it was less a matter of satisfying intellectual curiosity... than of enlightening a spiritual experience which was becoming aware of itself and aspiring to penetrate more deeply into God. Even for those vigorous and brilliant minds, this experience had little concern for speculative problems ... but showed a marked interest in a practical and living doctrine, in a simple but genuine testimony of a teaching that was lived."

These contacts confirmed Marie-Eugene's fundamental intuition that the Carmelite spirituality was not destined only for the monastic life but was meant for all Christians, even those living in the secular world.

One day, after a lecture, the ladies told him, "We give you all we have. Tell us what we must do and we shall do it."

Marie-Eugene's thoughts were maturing. "I realized that a group was possible."

God was leading the events. In 1932, a combination of them guided the unfolding of His plan, with might and sweetness, requiring the faith and hope, to the point of folly, of the people concerned.

## 21

## WORK AND PRAYER

The three ladies' ardent desire was to give themselves totally to God's will for them. Naturally, they thought that He was calling them to Carmel since their spiritual life was being nourished with the teachings of the Carmelite Masters. They were ready to be told that they would have to abandon everything they were doing in the world in order to offer themselves completely to God by living the monastic life. How surprised they were, therefore, when Fr. Marie-Eugene told them that they should not abandon the exercise of their profession in the world; on the contrary, they should continue to do it in the service of others.

But to do that perfectly they should not be contented with educating their students by giving them only a high level of intellectual formation. They would have to integrate human development with spiritual life that is based on prayer and spiritual learning, which could be lived practically in the ordinary conditions of everyday life. But how to unite prayer and life in the world, they wondered. Doesn't a life of prayer require that one live in

a convent, sheltered from the solicitations and distractions of the world?

On his part, Marie-Eugene thrilled interiorly when he saw that these ladies who were very actively involved in the world were at the same time deeply thirsty for spiritual life. For him it was a strong support of his presentiment that the Carmelite spirituality that he was living could also be for lay people who were actively engaged in addressing social issues of their time. He, therefore, shared with them his intuition. Without their being aware of it, Marie-Eugene, through his teachings, was already preparing and forming them to recognize the possibility of a life of prayer and contemplation well united with an active participation in temporal affairs. Performing one's duties in the exercise of one's profession or any other social involvement doesn't have to be a hindrance to one's spiritual life. But to work for the Kingdom of God here on earth is not only to accomplish a good job; it is to bear witness to the divine life in us. The true fruitfulness of one's work can be assured only by a strong and authentic spiritual life.

## the year 1932

## 22

The year 1932 is a year to remember. That year the Carmelite Order established two semi-provinces in France: the North and the South. This meant that there had to be a novitiate in the south as there was the novitiate in Avon for the north. Marie-Eugene was designated prior of Agen with the task of organizing a novitiate there for the newly

created southern province of Avignon-Aquitaine. He therefore had to leave. What would happen to the teaching that he had started to give to this small group? What would happen to the desire of Marie Pila, Jeanne Grousset and Germaine Romieu who were eager to give themselves completely to God's plan for them? Marie-Eugene himself had thought they were the instruments God had sent to him for the realization of his intuition – to share the spirit of Carmel with all, even with lay people living and working in the secular world. For that, he needed to form generous souls to live according to this spirit and then send them out to the world, there to become His witnesses. God loves the world so much that He wants to give Himself to all those who are ready to accept His love.

This new nomination seemed once more to put an end to Marie-Eugene's work. But he had to obey, in faith. Like Abraham of old, he was ready to make the sacrifice of his project in order to be in God's will. And God did not abandon him or the work, which, as it turned out, was God's project. While Marie-Eugene was in Agen, the three ladies spent one year each, one after the other, in solitude in the property of Notre Dame de Vie, in the valley of Venasque, which is in the archdiocese of Avignon, that had been offered to him for a Carmelite work. What could be a better preparation for them than to put themselves totally at God's disposal for the accomplishment of His project?

But Marie-Eugene and the three ladies, who were destined to be the foundation stones of the group that

would adopt the name "Notre Dame de Vie," (Our Lady of Life) had to experience purifications and detachment from their own plans in order to be totally attuned to God and His plan.

### separation: test of faith

23

After four years in Agen, the novitiate having been established, Marie-Eugene, at the provincial chapter held in Agen, was named prior of the Convent of Monte Carlo, which was a college for Carmelite seminarians in philosophy and theology. During all those years that he was far from Notre Dame de Vie, he made it a point to go back there to give an annual retreat in August to the budding group. Thus, he was able to continue dispensing the teaching needed for the formation of the members.

He wrote to his sister Berthe: "In this work, I want a method of formation and of apostolate to be elaborated that will be able to fight efficaciously all the evil that hell has worked out in our times." That was in July 1936, shortly before World War II.

However, he stayed in Monte Carlo for only one year. In April of 1937, he was elected third definitor general of the Order, which meant that he had to reside in Rome. He wrote to Berthe: "The work of Notre Dame de Vie will continue and will be organized in a regular fashion. My departure will certainly be advantageous to it." But he did not know how it would come about.

Would he still be able to take care of the group, or should the project now be abandoned? At each turning point, at each difficult moment they had to face, Marie-Eugene and the three ladies could only turn to God and the Blessed Mother, *Notre Dame de Vie*, for light and strength. Their faith always came out purified and enlivened, and their gift of self was never taken back, even in the darkest night. As they were seeing the light on the next move to make, they also received the boldness to take audacious steps forward. Marie-Eugene's presence in Rome facilitated the recognition of the group by the Order of Carmel, first of all, and then also officially by the Church. The benefit of obedience! The fruit of faith!

They were certainly walking on the right path.

## 24

### "I want to see God"

Marie-Eugene stayed in Rome, taking care of the affairs of the Order of Carmel from 1937 to 1955, except during the war. During all those years, he continued to give the annual retreat in *Notre Dame de Vie*, and to follow seriously the development and organization of the foundation, as the general of Carmel had commanded him to do. When in 1946 he wrote down the Constitutions of the group in preparation for its recognition as a secular institute, he only ratified what the group had been trying to live for fifteen years. He discovered that the way of life followed by the members – their method of formation and of apostolate – fitted perfectly the desire of the Church for the work of evangelization in modern times.

While in Rome, Marie-Eugene continued to disseminate the Carmelite doctrine through numerous talks and retreats that he preached. But the most important means was the publication of his book, *I Want to See God*, a synthesis of the spiritual and mystical doctrine of Carmel, that came out in two volumes: the first was published in October 1949 and the second in March 1951. Cardinal Piazza, OCD, wrote him in 1952: "I am deeply grateful to you for this gift that you make to the Order and to the whole Church that reveals the whole grandeur of *La Madre* and the value of her doctrine for the formation and guidance of true apostles of all times."

On her part, Marie Pila, who had become in the meantime superior general of *Notre Dame de Vie* Institute, was overflowing with gratefulness for this great and luminous synthesis of the teaching of the Carmelite masters in the light of Marie-Eugene's own personal spiritual experience. After the publication of the second volume, *I am a Daughter of the Church*, she wrote him: "Your book brings us so many lights, certitudes and joy. It is unique of its kind; it reveals to us the message of the Saints of Carmel in a living synthesis that leaves the originality of each one intact... What love for souls and for the Church there is in these luminous pages, fruit of so much work and fatigue, which assure its fruitfulness! The last chapter especially holds our attention... it is the crowning of this great work... Our gratitude to you is immense."

The last chapter, which is entitled "The Saint in the Whole Christ", deals with the question of the union of

contemplation and apostolate – the twofold movement of love – and of the spiritual formation of persons who commit themselves to the work of evangelization and witnessing, that is, the formation of contemplative apostles.

25

## the philippine foundation

In 1954, at the death of Fr. Silverio, general of the Order, Marie-Eugene, who had become first definitor general, took over the responsibility of the Carmelite Order. He continued to make the canonical visits to convents of the Carmelite Fathers in different countries, a work that he had started in 1939. Thus, during a visit to the Philippines, he was able to officiate at the first foundation of his Institute outside of France, on Christmas 1954. It was in answer to the persistent call for help of the Carmelite bishop of Infanta, Quezon, Msgr. Patrick Shanley, that the Founder decided to bring his Institute to the Philippines. He accepted to send members of *Notre Dame de Vie* to help Msgr. Shanley and the Carmelite Fathers in the difficult mission of evangelization in the Prelature of Infanta, which was a poor and isolated region and where, at that time, no religious group wanted to go. Both Marie-Eugene and Marie Pila were present for this first foundation of the Institute outside of its cradle in Venasque to support the two members who were assigned to start the work of the Institute in Asia: Marie-Louise Goux and Elizabeth Moulin. They were, after a very short time, to be followed by others.

With his prophetic gaze, the Founder already foresaw that this new foundation in the Philippines would be the first implantation of the Institute in the region that was to be followed by others. He called the Philippine foundation the "launching pad for Asia."

After this first foundation, others were envisaged within France as well as in other countries. And everywhere, the teaching of the Carmelite Masters was welcomed and adopted, notwithstanding the differences in culture. Marie-Eugene's intuition regarding the universality of the Carmelite doctrine proved to be true and well founded, and the method of apostolate of a secular institute, timely.

While the origin of the doctrine is in the teaching of the Masters of Carmel, Marie-Eugene needed a model that was fitted to the witnessing of the members of his Institute as it was penetrating very varied situations in secular society and in different countries.

em er ent i an a

26

How to bring the spirit of Carmel and the life of prayer to the midst of the world, "to the boulevards," as the Founder used to say, and to the varied places and situations where ordinary people live and work? So far, his models – Teresa of Avila and Therese of the Child Jesus – were Carmelite nuns who had lived in their monasteries. Marie-Eugene needed to find one that the members could effectively follow as they lived and exercised secular professions and apostolate in the midst of the world and sometimes in very secularized societies.

Through a light that came to him in prayer, he grasped with utter clarity the message of the little saint Emerentiana who had revealed herself to him as early as 1926-1927. "I was a religious in Lille and each year on 23 January I used to perceive a presence and a grace bestowed on me. Three feasts were then celebrated on that date. Without hesitation I picked her out: she is the one! Emerentiana!"

Saint Emerentiana is a saint of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, most probably the daughter of a slave who was the wet-nurse of St. Agnes, the young daughter of a patrician family. She became the playmate of Agnes whom she served humbly and faithfully. Agnes was Christian, and she was martyred for that. Emerentiana was Christian at heart, like her mistress, even though she was not yet baptized. She was heroically faithful to Agnes whose faith and love she shared to the point of martyrdom.

For a secular institute whose members may be called to render great services in the Church and in society, Marie-Eugene needed to set before them a model of secular consecration and witnessing, of heroic fidelity and humble service. The members (and, in fact, all Christians involved in the Church's mission in the world) need a model of humility and faithfulness if they are to be true to their mission of being yeast in the dough, hidden and effective.

The Founder considered the place of Emerentiana so fundamental in the life of the Institute that, in 1957, he asked for a special indulst to celebrate a special Mass in her honor. Emerentiana continued to reveal herself to Marie-Eugene who discovered more and more clearly her place

and her role in the life of the members of a secular institute as in the life of any faithful worker in the Vineyard of the Lord. Every year on her feast, he developed in his homily different aspects of the life of Emerentiana, "You must imitate Emerentiana in her humility, first of all by accepting your situation (...) This humility, which is the acceptance of what you are, of what God has done for you, and of the situation in which He has placed you, whether it be the first or the last place, is at the foundation of all spiritual life. Truth and humility are the basis of all spiritual ascent and growth." (1960). "Do not forget that your role, wherever you may be, is to serve in silence, in a hidden way. What is important are the services that you render, the charity and the affection that you give, and not yourself and your personality." (1962). "[Emerentiana] comes as a living example of the realization of the law of Mercy that descends upon poverty (...) The spiritual, intellectual and technical formation you have received might encourage and strengthen your unhealthy tendencies and produce a certain pride of the personality, pride because of what you have done, and even because of the graces you have received. And she comes (...) to remind you of the great law of poverty necessary to receive Mercy." (1965).

"From now on, you will consider her as (...) the one who leads the way by her example, the one who enlightens and encourages, the one who shows you what you must do and how you must do it." (1957).

27

## model of the contemplative apostle in the modern world

The Founder discovered through St. Emerentiana the suitable attitude to be inculcated in the members of his secular Institute for them to be efficacious in their mission in the world. But how were they to adapt it to modern times? How to ensure this way of humility by uniting the spiritual life of prayer and active involvement in the world? Was it possible?

As usual, God led Marie-Eugene to discover it through experience in ordinary life. It was in the life of his sister Berthe, who had become a member of the Institute, that he found the light. Berthe worked as an accountant in a public vocational school. In that very secular situation, she was called "the Christian," because she lived her Christian commitment to the point of heroism. Speaking of her after her death on January 2, 1958, Marie-Eugene said, "She makes us discover in a concrete way how we are to incarnate our mission. She was inconspicuous in the crowd in a very ordinary professional life, adding many activities to her daily professional tasks. She did not like to be remarkable or prominent, but never did she shirk the obligations arising from duty..."

In fact, Berthe was not contented with doing her duties as accountant in her school. Her duties over, she would find time to visit the sick in the hospital, talk with them, awaken their hope. She was interested in their concerns; her frequent visits made her know them well.

She would talk to them about God and His Love for them. Her charity gave them solace in their suffering.

This great charity was stirred by Berthe's deep spiritual life. She constantly felt the need to pray, to be united more intimately with God, and to pray even more at moments of difficulty and struggle, even in the midst of a busy work schedule. She knew that the charity and affection she could give had to come from a divine source, otherwise they would not be true and, therefore, they could not do any good. She united in her ordinary daily living the two movements of love taught by the Founder.

Even when *Notre Dame de Vie* Institute had developed and became an institute with three autonomous branches – laywomen, laymen and priests – Berthe's example would remain the model for all the members. The Founder said, "I am the one who gave the teaching, but she's the one who lived it, especially poverty... The example she has set must be followed by each one of us, and by the Institute." And again, "She is the model of the apostle of *Notre Dame de Vie*."

twenty-fifth anniversary:  
feast of our lady of life

28

When Marie-Eugene went back to France in May 1955, after completing his term at the Carmelite Generalate in Rome, he resided in the convent of Petit Castelet. He soon became the prior of the convent. At the provincial chapter of the Carmelite Fathers in July 1957, he was

elected provincial of Avignon-Aquitaine for three years.

In August of that year, Notre Dame de Vie Institute celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation. In his homily, the Founder said: "During these 25 years that we have been here, we have seen great things... there has been an overflowing of the merciful love of God (...) Since it is our particular mission, may the sources, the springs of the Holy Spirit gush forth everywhere – abundant, luminous and transforming – through the bosom of the Virgin Mary, through her whom we love to call Notre Dame de Vie since she is especially our Mother."

Marie-Eugene realized more and more that the Institute was a work of God entrusted to the Blessed Virgin. He was the human instrument in her hands to carry out God's plan in time, but he was convinced that the true foundress of the Institute was the Blessed Virgin herself. That year he instituted Easter Monday, the day after the triumph of the Risen Lord, as the day of joy for His Mother. Henceforth and until the end of time, the whole Institute will celebrate this day as the feast of the Mother of Life.

As has already been mentioned, earlier that year Marie-Eugene obtained an indult to celebrate a special feast of St. Emerentiana, the saint who had imposed herself as the model for the life of the members of his Institute. She was a secular person who dedicated herself to the service of her mistress, St. Agnes, whose spirit she had made her own. Isn't this precisely the image of Notre Dame de Vie Institute at the service of the grace of Carmel? The Institute is an extension of Carmel in the midst of the

world, bringing there its charisma of prayer united with the Institute's ministry and active apostolate and simple witnessing.

FATHER MARIE-EUGENE RESIDES  
IN NOTRE DAME DE VIE

29

During those years, Marie-Eugene saw coming to Notre Dame de Vie some priests and some laymen who were attracted by the spirit of the Institute: they were going to be the first members of the sacerdotal branch and of the laymen's branch of the Institute. For the Founder, this was another confirmation that the Carmelite spirituality of contemplation and action is for people from all walks of life who are thirsty for a deep and living relationship with God and who want to share it with others.

When in February 1961 he was given the authorization to reside in the motherhouse of Notre Dame de Vie, Marie-Eugene continued to perform his responsibilities in the Order, while at the same time giving to the Institute his solicitude and his teachings in a more regular way: instructions to the members in formation, homilies and celebrations of feasts, talks, and annual retreats. Whenever his schedule allowed it, he took part in the community recreations where he encouraged lively exchanges of views and continued to teach by giving very practical applications of the doctrine in life.

The retreats that he gave to the members during those last years brought to light the Founder's prophetic gaze at the future. But, since the beginning, in the retreats that he preached to the community, he was touching on topics that were necessary for the formation of the members on the human and spiritual levels. Thus, he explained in practical terms the spirit of obedience, chastity and poverty, but he also talked about human love, technical formation, inculcation and apostolate, as well as about Jesus, the spiritual man, consecrated life, the prophetic vocation, baptismal grace, and other topics. The members can therefore go back to these teachings whenever they need to know what to do practically at various stages of the Institute's growth and to have a guideline for their personal life.

Marie-Eugene continued to follow actively the great events in the Church. He earnestly took part in congresses involving the Order of Carmel as well as the secular Institutes. He was always sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit concerning the growth and expansion of *Notre Dame de Vie* Institute: in 1962, the first group of laymen attached themselves to the Institute; in 1964, the first priest-members made their commitment in the Institute. That same year, some members of the Institute were sent to Spain and Canada for secular apostolate. And this expansion was to continue in the following years.

The Holy Spirit seemed to be in haste to accomplish something.

the holy spirit:  
the future of the institute

30

Marie-Eugene became quite sick in 1965, but he continued to follow very closely the developments in the Second Vatican Council and its call to aggiornamento: "The Holy Church invites us to unite ourselves to the closing of the Council, this great work of God and, we could say, the great work of the Holy Spirit...." The annual retreat in 1966 was titled "The Holy Spirit, The Future of the Institute." The Founder's insistence on the role of the Holy Spirit and the depth of his affirmations gripped the hearts of those who listened to him. However, little did they suspect that this would be the last retreat he would preach to his Institute.

"When I speak of the Holy Spirit, ordinarily I get stirred up quite easily ... I call Him 'my Friend' and I believe I have reasons for doing so. My whole life has been based on the knowledge and the discovery of the Holy Spirit. It has been so since the beginning of my religious life and [especially] on several occasions when I felt the Holy Spirit taking hold of me in a vigorous way, in a way that was absolutely certain... You are my children; I am your Father [...] I think that you yourselves feel this filiation of grace. Well, it is with all the powers of my paternity, with all its rights, that I ask for the Holy Spirit for you."

In spite of his serious sickness, his energy and dynamism remained: he multiplied trips and visits to convents and monasteries, giving retreats and counsel

to the Carmelites. He insisted on the organization of a catechetical center in the Philippines.

In August 1966, he witnessed the final commitment of the first laymen members of the Institute. The last Mass he celebrated in the chapel of *Notre Dame de Vie* was on Christmas Eve 1966. He had just come back from the clinic, seriously ill and in great pain. In his Christmas greetings, he still gave instructions for joy and hope.

### 31 towards the "EMBRACE of the HOLY SPIRIT"

Between Christmas and the following Easter, Marie Pila and other members of the Institute took turns in constantly caring for Marie-Eugene and in carefully recording all the teachings that he continued to give through his words and attitudes.

In January and February 1967, he still carried on his duties as provincial, regularly dictating letters from his bed and answering all the letters he received. He even convoked the Provincial Council in his sick room. "The hand of the living God has seized me in an unexpected way. At certain times, in my weakness, I find his grip strong and painful... The help of the charity that surrounds me allows me not to interrupt my task."

On March 19, Palm Sunday, he exhibited extreme weakness, but three days later, he still dictated a last letter, which he could no longer sign. On Holy Thursday, day of priesthood, he would have liked to celebrate the Holy

Eucharist, but on that day only one Mass could be celebrated. He was given Holy Communion under two species, which he received wearing his stole, saying, "I am a priest!" The following day, Good Friday, the last sacraments for the dying were administered to him.

On Easter evening, Marie-Eugene had a premonition that his end was near. He called Marie Pila and those who surrounded her to approach his bed to receive his last directives: "Keep the fidelity to the spirit of the Institute, fidelity to the Order, to the essential – action and contemplation well united."

The following day, March 27, 1967, at 8:50 in the evening, Marie-Eugene surrendered himself to the "embrace of the Holy Spirit." It was Easter Monday: *Notre Dame de Vie* came to fetch him to unite him to her glory and joy as Mother of Life!

### "TRADITUS GRATIAE DEI"

### 32

Father Marie-Eugene's last words before dying were:

"My God I love you,  
I will always love you."

A few days earlier, he had declared to Marie Pila,  
If I had had to choose a motto,  
I would have taken  
'Traditus Gratiae Dei.'  
For *Notre Dame de Vie* also  
this is a fitting motto.

What is a child of *Notre Dame de Vie*?  
Someone who is 'Traditus Gratiae Dei.'  
Surrendered, not to God, but to the grace of God.  
Do you understand what that means?  
To be surrendered to God: that is vague.  
It does not correspond to the reality,  
And yet how many people have this illusion.  
In incarnating Himself,  
the Holy Spirit individualizes Himself.  
However, He is wholly present in each one,  
while remaining the same.  
What a mystery!  
To be surrendered to God's grace in me, to my grace –  
that is the reality, the true incarnation,  
the identification with Christ.  
You should explain that to our children."

All his life, Marie-Eugene's deepest desire was to realize the double movement of the spirit of the Prophet Elijah, Father of Carmel – contemplation and action well united – to be constantly in search of God and be docile to the Spirit, and to transmit the spiritual riches coming from his secret intimacies with God-Love to all. Thus, his final recommendation to his children was to carry out this fundamental preoccupation:

"After my death, you will get to work  
as soon as possible on catechesis,  
to teach others how to love God."



Around 1900



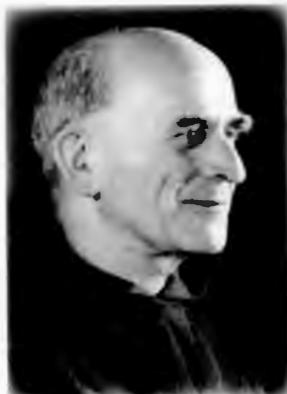
Henri with mother  
and sisters



Lt. Henri Grialou, 1916



Day of his Perpetual Profession  
March 11, 1926



Definitor General  
of Carmel



Founder of Notre Dame de  
Vie Institute



Blangy, France



España, Philippines, 1964

## PRAYING WITH FATHER MARIE-EUGENE

*To turn towards God is already to pray, since prayer - a friendly conversation with God - is nothing else than the filial movement of grace towards God who is our Father. Nothing seems more easy and more simple than to follow that filial instinct of grace and, consequently, to pray.*

*I Want to See God, 182*

*Prayer is an art - one of the most delicate - that requires a technique. It is learned only by a persevering exercise that requires supernatural dispositions and great patience.*

*I Want to See God, 182*

*If prayer is to be powerful, it must be perfect; the efficacy of prayer depends especially on the degree of sanctity of the soul who makes it.*

*I Want to See God, 127*



How to draw upon us the inflowing of the Spirit, and how to abandon ourselves and cooperate with His conquering action?... Certain dispositions of soul have a seemingly irresistible attraction for Him. He demands active cooperation with His action.

I Want to See God, p. 360

The gift of self is a deep need of love, and its most perfect act... It is an oblation, offering as it does to God all that we have and all that we are, accepting in advance His every will and His good pleasure.... An essential disposition of Christ, the complete gift of self is an essential disposition of every Christian.

I Want to See God, pp.364, 368

Humility is attractive to God! Everywhere that it is found, there God is. And everywhere that God is here below, He clothes Himself, as it were, with a garment that conceals His Presence from the proud and reveals it to the simple and the little ones... The sign of humility always marks the Divine here below.

I Want to See God, p.387

To stop, to look at oneself would be a sin against the Spirit. The Spirit is moving - we are not here to watch the Spirit running! We must let ourselves be carried away by the Spirit.

Conference, Notre Dame de Vie



The Holy Spirit, whom we received in Baptism and in Confirmation, is a living God, capable of giving a penetrating light, of inspiring us, of enlightening us about people, events, about ourselves and the future... He will do it, if necessary.

Homily, 2 July 1962

The grace that the Holy Spirit pours into our souls is a filial grace, which likens us closely to the Word by making us sons by adoption, as He Himself is by nature. The apostle Paul says: 'You have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God. But if we are sons, we are heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ.

I Am a Daughter of the Church, pp. 599-600



How do we know that the Holy Spirit works with us? We know it. Our Lord tells us, by His actions. The activity of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the union of our activity with His - all this is seen in works that bear the seal, the mark of the Holy Spirit.

Notes, Pentecost 1959

The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, the soul of our soul, the life of our life. He penetrates us. "His delights are to be with the children of men." The first thing we must do is to believe in the Holy Spirit, to be aware of His presence and develop our faith in Him.

Conference 1957

God speaks in silence, and silence alone seems able to express Him. For the spiritual person who has known the touch of God, silence and God seem to be identified... He preserves with jealous care the silence that gives him God, and defends it against any agitation.

I Want to See God, p. 410

Our Lord had friends during His life on earth. To His apostles He told the secrets of the Kingdom of God, the mysteries of His intimate life... In Christ, friendship is the fruit of a free choice of His merciful tenderness, desirous of giving itself... The quality of the friendship depends on the movement from which it proceeds, the love that animates it.

I Want to See God, p. 160

Let us go at God's pace. It is He who does the willing and the doing. Let us be patient with ourselves and not say that grace is dead because it acts slowly [...] Let us believe in the strength of grace; let us believe in the call to sanctity which does not come from us nor from our capacities, but from the vitality of grace.

Retreat 1944

Great desires and humility go hand in hand, answering for one another, and mutually benefiting themselves. Humility alone can sustain the great desires and keep them fixed on their goal amid the vicissitudes of the spiritual life. On the other hand, it would be a false humility that would induce the soul to renounce its great desires and become a victim to tepidity or mere respectable mediocrity.

I Want to See God, p. 181

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to make us know and understand God's will, not in all the details and in advance by a prophetic light, but enough for us to know it well. Let us ask Him not only to make us discover God's will but mostly to push us to accomplish it in our life.

Notes, Pentecost 1959

It is God who makes His saints and who, lovingly and progressively, presses them on to heroism, rousing in their souls those cries and aspirations that carry them to the heights.

I Am Daughter of the Church, p. 136

Love's great reward is to bear the resemblance with Jesus in oneself... We ask for the reward [you gave to Veronica] - the resemblance with you, your portrait that we carry in our memories, in our hearts, your image that we would like to be imprinted in our souls, on our faces.

Meditation, 31 March 1961

Jesus Christ is the Light that enlightens every mind coming into this world, the Light that shines in our darkness, and that we can follow without fear of going astray.

I Want to See God, p. 222



The plenitude of Christ is poured out upon each one of us. We receive of His grace by which we share in His divine sonship and in all His privileges. We are sons and heirs of the Father as He is.

I Am a Daughter of the Church, p. 195

The soul must believe in the loving and efficacious solicitude of divine Wisdom. It must be aware of this in all that happens to it and draw from all events that touch it the grace and light that they are meant to bring to it... A humble and loving submission will usually suffice for the soul to gather these treasures.

I Am a Daughter of the Church, p. 134

*Study and research should be harmonized with a life of prayer and with experience, so that each [one] can feel the interior impulse to communicate the treasures of spiritual life to all people to the point that one conveys them with the tone of someone who has really "seen" God.*

To Carmelite seminarians, 1955

*God adapts the distribution of His grace to the conditions of our nature. God became man to bring us His divine life. He instituted the sacraments to be the channels of grace. He makes habitual and continual use of external events and of free causes as messengers of His light and most authentic intermediaries of His grace.*

I Want to See God, p. 258

*O Jesus, allow us to place ourselves under the influence of your prayer. Only your action and your firm hold on us can lead us to the Father who will then take possession of us.*

Meditation, 19 April 1962



*O Virgin Mary, grant that our souls may benefit from your fruitfulness. Our great desire is that you may bestow the life of the Risen Christ upon the whole Church... Be Mother, Mother till the end, not only Mother of Life, Mother of Love, but Mother of Mercy, of this life that comes down even upon misery in order to restore it, to revivify it, and to uplift it.*

Meditation, 2 April 1961

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- Unpublished notes of Retreats, Conferences, Homilies, Meditations, given in *Notre Dame de Vie*.

The statue whose picture appears on the previous page can be found in the Sanctuary of *Notre Dame de Vie* in Venasque, France where the remains of Fr. Marie-Eugene and Marie Pila are buried.

BOOKS BY FR. MARIE-EUGENE IN ENGLISH:

- *I Want to See God* and *I Am a Daughter of the Church*, translated by Sr. M. Verda Clare, C.S.C., Fides Publishers Association, Chicago, Illinois

These two books were translated into English respectively in 1953 and 1955 and are now available in a single condensed edition, *Christian Classics*, 1986.

- *Jesus. Contemplation of the Paschal Mystery*, translated by Carmelite Nuns of Darlington Carmel, printed at Darlington Carmel, England. Translation of *Jesus. Contemplation du Mystère Pascal*, Editions du Carmel, Venasque, 1986
- *Under the Torrent of His Love: Therese of Lisieux, a Spiritual Genius*, translated by Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, OP, Alba House, New York, 1995. Translation of *Ton amour a grandi avec moi: Un génie spirituel, Thérèse de Lisieux*, Editions du Carmel, Venasque, 1987
- *Where the Spirit Breathes: Prayer and Action*, translated by Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, OP, Alba House, New York, 1998. Translation of *Au Souffle de l'Esprit: Prière et Action*, Editions du Carmel, Venasque, 1990
- *More Mother than Queen*, translated by Josefina Dejoras and Ma. Teresita Giron, Association of Monasteries of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in the Philippines, Quezon City, 2001. Translation of *La Vierge Marie toute Mère*, Editions du Carmel, Venasque, 1988



This is a brief biography of Fr. Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, Carmelite, spiritual master for our time (Henri Grialou, 1894-1967). Presented in short sketches, this book traces the important events in this life led by the Spirit. In his spiritual testament he wishes: "May the Holy Spirit descend upon you, so that you will be able to say, as soon as possible, that the Holy Spirit is your friend, that the Holy Spirit is your light, that the Holy Spirit is your master."

All his life, Fr. Marie-Eugene's deepest desire was to realize the double movement of the spirit of Carmel - "contemplation and action well united". He founded the secular Institute of Notre-Dame de Vie, for laypersons (men and women) and priests. They are called to be constantly in search of God and be docile to the Spirit, to transmit the spiritual riches coming from their secret intimacies with God-Love to all. Since 1954, the Institute is established in the Philippines.

Fr. Marie-Eugene is the author of *I Want to See God* - *I am a Daughter of the Church*, a spiritual masterpiece for our time, which has sold more than 100,000 copies in six languages.

The Cause for his Beatification was opened in the Arch-diocese of Avignon (France) in 1985.