

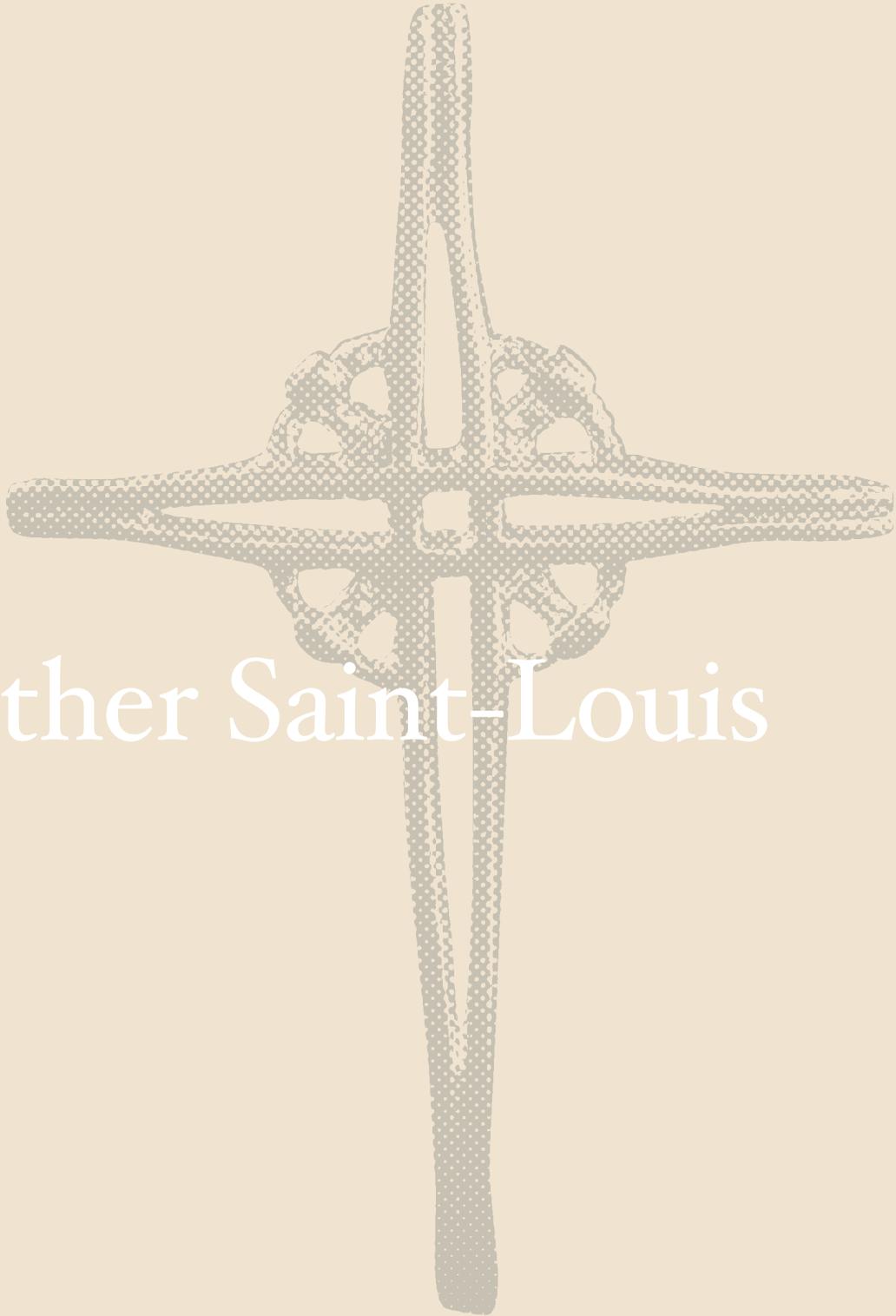


Produced by The Sisters of Charity of Saint-Louis

Louise-Élisabeth de Lamoignon,
Married to Édouard Molé de Champlâtreux, Mother Saint-Louis
Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Saint-Louis

*

1763-1825



Mother Saint-Louis

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« When can I ever return him love for Love ? »

Sœur St Louis

« *To return love for Love* ¹ »

In the life of Mother Saint-Louis, this expression was first of all a promise before it appeared again in her writings as the humble admission of her difficulty in loving with the same depth of love that she felt and received. Several times in her conferences to our first sisters she would repeat this expression to call to mind the essence of our vocation. The contemplation of the merciful Love of Christ the Redeemer was for her like a « door » that opened up to the mystery of God, to the mystery of our humanity, as well as being the foundation of a life of service at the heart of the Church and the world.

Born into a family in which, according to her biographers « one seemed born only to practice justice and do good ², » Mother Saint-Louis inherited this sensitivity. Devastated by what the Revolution of 1789 had done to those she held most dear, she was tempted to hate, but her attachment to Christ worked a change in her, giving her as she had asked « a heart according to the heart of God. » Behind the faces of the victims and torturers she then saw that of the wounded Christ, who invited her to create and restore, through love and forgiveness, that which was the best in humanity. It was in this spirit of respect and restitution that she set up workrooms where instruction, education and formation were geared towards giving vulnerable and idle young girls the means to be socially responsible and to live with the personal dignity she recognised in them.

The world has changed since the 19th century, but like the one Mother Saint-Louis knew, ours is also a changing world, often divided, alluring but ruthless for some, hard or uncertain for so many others. Still, for the disciple of Christ, today like yesterday, God's cause and that of humanity remain inextricably linked. It was the discovery and then the conviction of Mother Saint-Louis that doing the work of God was to become love, by letting oneself be transformed by that love which is God. « Returning love for Love » became the basis of her work of restoration, the very work of the God of Jesus Christ which can have no other source or inspiration.

From Louise-Élisabeth to Mother Saint-Louis, there is a personal and spiritual journey, a quest, which today can still resonate with that of so many.

Sister Nicole JÉGO,

General Superior

¹ Mother Saint Louis, Lettres, Vol.2, p. 165.

² Fléchier, Oraison funèbre de Guillaume de Lamoignon (1677) quoted in Vie de Madame Molé, Marquis de Ségur, 1880, p. 5.

Who is Mother Saint-Louis?

* A happy childhood 1763-1779

Louise-Élisabeth de Lamoignon was born in Paris on October 3, 1763, in a family belonging to the French aristocracy. Her father, Christian-François de Lamoignon, Councillor of State and Keeper of the Seals of France, was married to Marie-Elisabeth Berryer, « one of the best matches in Paris. » Louise-Élisabeth was baptized on the day of her birth at their parish church of Saint Sulpice. Surrounded by six brothers and sisters, she grew up happy in a Christian environment in which there was a concern for justice and charity. One of her biographers mentions that she was gifted with a lively and enquiring mind, grasping all subjects with ease and pursuing the arts with equal talent and refinement. Her maternal grandmother, Madame Berryer, a highly cultured woman, introduced her to a life based on Christian values, especially a love for the poor, which would mark her entire life. She prepared her for her First Communion during which she « received, though still very young, great graces from God. I will never forget them ¹. »

*N'espérez point que je n'aie obtenu en moi un incendie d'amour.
en un mot, quoique bien jeune alors de grandes
graces de Dieu. je ne les oublierai jamais*



* Spouse and mother 1779-1803

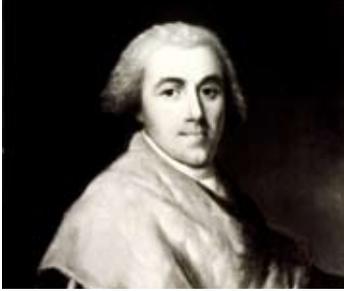
Even though she dreamt of a life of solitude and prayer, on February 9, 1779, Louise-Élisabeth married 19 year old François-Édouard Molé de Champlâtreux. « At the age of 15, my parents united me to the best and most virtuous of men ². » Five children were born into this close-knit home. Two died in their infancy. Moving from the sheltered setting of her adolescence into a worldly society, obsessed with intrigue and pointless vanities, gave her the opportunity to have her say. Even though she accepted the obligations of her social position, she made a choice - with the support of her husband - for a simpler life style and for service to the poor, who called her « the Angel of the garrets, » for lack of knowing her name that she concealed out of discretion and humility. « They say that by giving alms one can enter into heaven in a carriage with six horses; at the rate you are going, my darling, it's with twelve horses that you'll be entering. If you get there first, prepare a place for me close to you ³, » her husband told her.



¹ Mother Saint-Louis, *Lettres*, Vol.2, p. 50.

² Mother Saint-Louis, *Testament spirituel*, November 27, 1810.

³ Levé, Placide, SJ, *Vie de Madame Molé de Champlâtreux*, Lyon-Paris, J.B. Pelagaud et Cie, 1857, p. 21.



François-Édouard, mari de Mme Molé
Mathieu, son fils
Félicité, sa fille

In the midst of her social occupations, Louise-Elisabeth felt an inner call to enter more deeply into a closer relationship with the Lord. « Prepared since my earliest youth by heavenly graces, solitude and seclusion held much attraction for me and were my heart's delight ⁴. » Most likely around the year 1784, she opened her heart about this to Father de Pancemont, then pastor of the parish of Saint-Sulpice in Paris.

As if to prepare her for the trials that awaited her, she felt the Lord urging her to make, what she called, « a covenant, a kind of pact with the cross of Jesus Christ, to remain attached to it all the rest of my life, and to die there, totally consumed by a spirit of love ⁵. »

In 1789, the revolution's rage crashed down upon the Molé de Champlâtreux family, whose name, rank, and fortune classed them among the guilty. Her husband was imprisoned three times, and she shared one of these incarcerations. Sick and semi-paralyzed, she was released, but it was only to learn, soon after, of her husband's death by guillotine on Easter Sunday, April 20, 1794. Evicted from the family home, she was thrown onto the street with her three children, Matthew, Felicity and Louise. There she was found and helped by a family friend, Antoine-Martin de Puisieux, and carried on a stretcher to an attic apartment in the rue du Bac in Paris. Louise-Élisabeth's faith did not falter, but she had to take on, alone, in utter destitution and anguish, an uncertain future for her children of whom the oldest, Matthew, was only 13. In 1796, she knew the pain of losing little Louise who apparently did not survive the hurt and deprivations imposed by these tormenting years.

The shock upon hearing the news of her husband's death had been brutal, but she recovered her moral courage after the first moments of heartrending loss had passed. Although still overwhelmed by sadness, she continued her spiritual journey under the wise and enlightened direction of Father de Pancemont, who led her towards forgiveness and the desire to repair what the country's calamities had destroyed on both the personal and societal level. « Every time God's image is tarnished, » she would later tell her daughters, « it is up to you to rectify that sad state of affairs and revive in them, by your gentleness and charity, those feelings that were stifled in them by an overdose of ills ⁶. »

During this period, while fulfilling her duties as a mother, she frankly put before Father de Pancemont the question about her own state of life after her children would be married.

He discerned in her the charism of a foundress and she consented to sacrifice her personal desire for the solitary life in order to consider the foundation in Paris of a

⁴ Mother Saint-Louis, Testament spirituel, November 27, 1810, Positio 1976, p. 349

⁵ Mother Saint-Louis, Lettres, édition 1991, Tome I, p. 88

⁶ Conférences spirituelles, p. 498

monastery that would combine contemplation with a work of charity. The director and his directee then kept up an active correspondence. But, the project was interrupted by the departure of Father de Pancemont.

* Foundress 1803-1825

Indeed, in 1802 Father de Pancemont was appointed as Bishop of Morbihan with residence in Vannes. From his office window he could see the harbour, with young girls hanging about the docks, idle and left to themselves. He invited his directee to join him in a charitable and educational undertaking. With her two children, Matthew and Felicity, established in life, she accepted the call of Monseigneur de Pancemont. « Nowhere else but in Vannes will you celebrate, not only the marvellous feast of Pentecost, but also that of the Ascension. ⁷ »

Louise-Élisabeth arrived in Vannes on May 19, 1803, with her mother and two companions. With the money she had supplied before her arrival, Monseigneur de Pancemont had bought a dilapidated building, a former monastery of Sisters Adorers that was ravaged during the revolution and went by the name of « Père Éternel » (Eternal Father). This is where the work of charity - workrooms for young girls - was inaugurated on May 25, the founding day of the Congregation to which she would give the name of « Sisters of Charity, Daughters of Saint-Louis. » In this saint, she saw a patron, a man of ardent and kind-hearted faith, a friend of the poor, a servant of the Church, a champion of justice and peace. That same day, she made public profession of religious vows before her bishop and director. She took the name of Sister Saint-Louis and was appointed superior of the new Congregation for life. Under Louis XVIII, the official title of the Congregation became « Sisters of Charity of Saint-Louis. »

Mother Saint-Louis organized the religious life of her community and accepted increasing numbers of poor children. She watched over the quality of their instruction and prepared them to earn their living by learning a trade in the newly created workrooms. Besides reading and writing, the little girls were taught how to weave cotton and produce beautiful lace. To the difficulties encountered in founding a congregation were added the hardships of exile and separation from her own kin as well as the misunderstanding and accusations from certain members of her family. Nevertheless, her concerns as foundress never prevented her from sharing in the joys and concerns that cropped up among her children and their families.



Mother Saint-Louis

⁷ Monseigneur de Pancemont, Lettres du 3 avril 1803, quoted in *L'âme d'une grande dame*, Vol. 1, p. 546.

et confirmons pour votre vie, Supérieure de la dite
maison du Père Éternel, pour la regir et gouverner
dans l'ordre spirituel et temporel, sous notre direction
et administration.

Donné à Vannes le mercredi 5 prairial an 11. / 25 mai 1803
Ant. Xav. Evêque de Vannes

Loger les bois de mes Curieuses
Le tout d'après les conventions faites avec mes Curieuses
qui ne consenti à le donner sa maison qu'à ces conditions,
me moi-même promet de son côté de donner la préférence aux
enfants d'auray dans son établissement

Duhayer
curé d'auray

Getting settled in Brittany was far from easy. From the beginning, the population looked with suspicion upon this bishop, who supported Napoleon, and that little group of Parisian ladies who had come to take charge of their children. Nevertheless, little by little the personality of the Foundress caught their attention and her goodness won the hearts of the Breton people.

In March 1807, the death of Monseigneur de Pancemont was a new ordeal, indeed, a disaster. Mother Saint-Louis knew the temptation to run away and leave all behind. But by September 8, 1807, she was responding to a request by Father Deshayes, pastor at Auray, to open there another house of charity, similar to the one in Vannes and also called « Père Éternel. » To this house, in 1818, she added the ministry of spiritual retreats to the work of educating poor children.

In 1816, thanks to the good reputation of « the work », she was offered the use of a former priory in Pléchâtel, in the diocese of Rennes, to set up a school there. In 1824, not long before her death, she acquired the ruined Abbey of Saint-Gildas de Rhuy to begin the foundation of another « house of charity. » Mother Saint-Louis died on March 4, 1825. She was 62 years old. At her death, there were 56 sisters with religious profession in the Congregation. She left behind four houses dedicated to the education of poor girls and to retreat work.

For Mother Saint-Louis as well as for Monseigneur de Pancemont, who was her partner from the outset in the planning and founding of the Congregation, what was most important in these works of mercy was furthering Christ's mission of universal reconciliation. To love as Christ loved: only that kind of love could bring renewal and healing. She always considered her work to be a collaboration with God's work and, with this in mind, she took care to give her first sisters a first rate personal and spiritual formation. She left us her writings and, in spite of her 18th century turn of phrase, we have her remarkably relevant reflections and analyses that underlie her vision of God, of humanity and of history.



Auray, Pléchâtel et St-Gildas

On January 16, 1986, His Holiness John-Paul II proclaimed her venerable, and by decree of His Holiness Benedict XVI, she was beatified on May 27, 2012, in Vannes, Morbihan, France.

The work of Madame Molé as seen by her contemporaries



Misunderstandings were not lacking. For many in Vannes, Madame Molé was first of all « the foreigner » : she had to confront the mistrust of the Breton people and the anticlericalism of the magistrates. In 1803, the political and religious passions were high and differences plentiful. In Vannes, Napoleon's arrival had done nothing to put out the royalist or republican fires, but had brought about the rise of an « organized resistance », resistance to the authority that Napoleon represented. Although historically linked to royalty, Madame Molé reminded many - through her connections with Monseigneur de Pancemont - of this despised Bonapartist power. Absorbed against her will by thoughts completely contrary to her deepest motivation, she wrote to her son: « *I have come to a country where God did not permit my work or my person to be loved.* »

Nevertheless, as time passed, her contemporaries began to appreciate the personality and goodness of the Foundress and the work she created. In 1824, the Morbihan Chronicles in Lycée Armoricaïn volume III called to mind « *the generous woman who, in dedicating herself to good works, has become the subject of public veneration in Vannes.* » In the same way, Faverot, the imperial Procurator, who did not have much good to say about religious matters, wrote that, concerning the Institution of Madame Molé: « The pupils - poor girls recruited from the lowest class of misfortune and destitution - are occupied with learning lace-making . . . they do some beautiful work of great value. They are taught reading, writing, arithmetic, all that can one day make these young persons into good wives and good mothers. In a word, this establishment is a benefit that will not remain without influence on the local standard of morality. »



Cousin à dentelle

Later, in 1834, nine years after the death of Madame Molé, one could read in the Directory of Morbihan:

« The most worthwhile establishment today, with reference to the manufacture of textile, is the House of charity under the direction of the « Ladies of Charity of Saint-Louis. » The purpose of their institution is the instruction of poor girls.

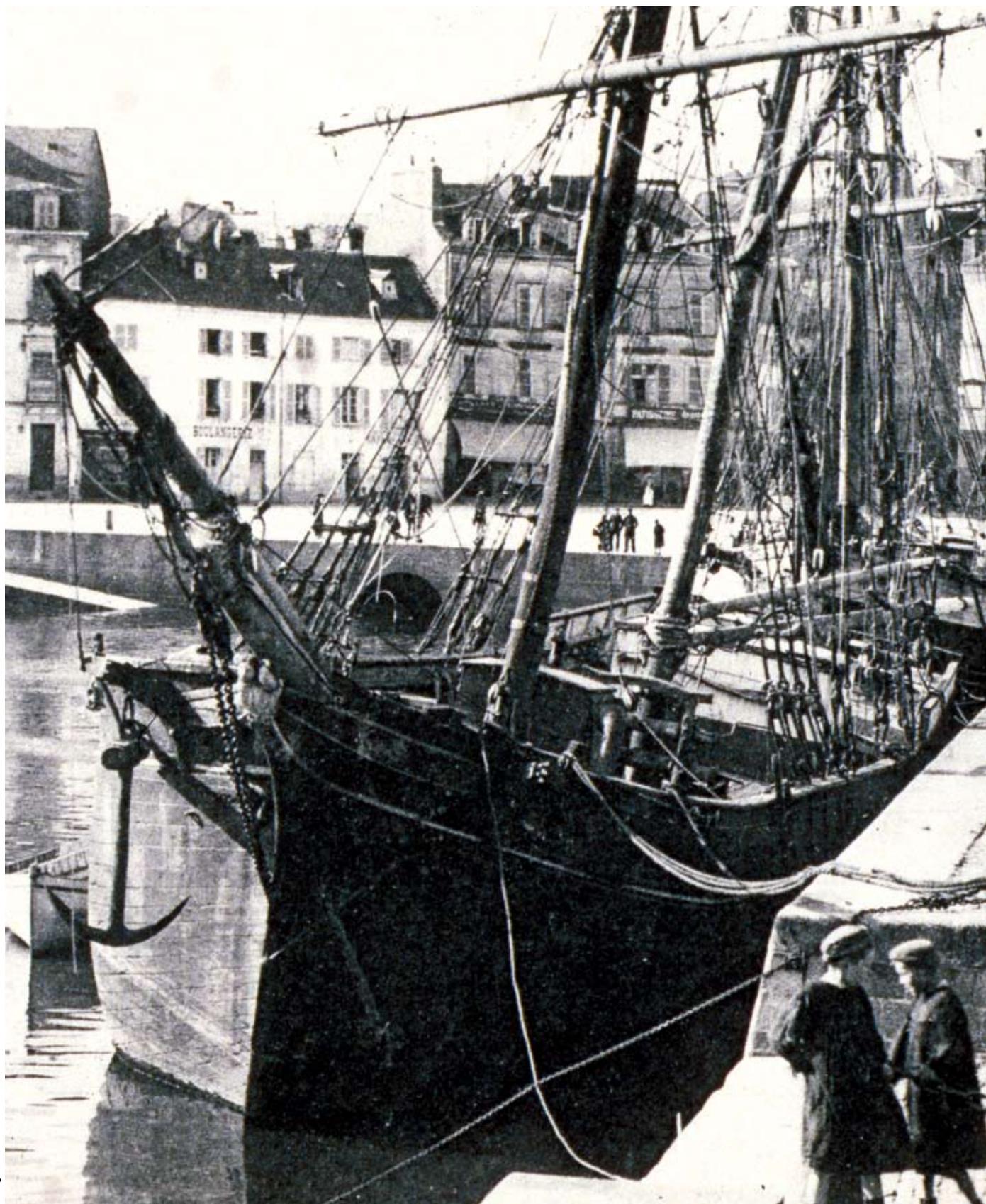
Accepted at the age of ten or twelve, the young girls receive a religious education, learn to work and remain as boarders in this house for five years, after which they go back to their parents equipped with a small trousseau. However, those who prefer to remain there receive an assured income for the value of their work.

At « Père Éternel » they make lace that is highly valued for its fine stitches and clearness of design. According to the connoisseurs, it can compete with the lace of Caen. They also spin cotton that is noteworthy for its uniformity and strength.

The directresses of this establishment were the first in the department to obtain spinning machines. The various products coming out of that workroom are exported to Nantes and to Paris, or are sold in the house itself, where they keep a shop that is open to the public. »

Annuaire du Morbihan, 1834, archives départementales, p. 101 - 102

What the Foundress accomplished for « Religion and Society » won her the gratitude of the people of Vannes. In 1896, by naming a street in her honour, « Rue Madame Molé », the City of Vannes honoured the economic and social contributions of Mother Saint-Louis in the service of its young people.



Brittany in 1800

A rough and untamed land, moors covered with spiny gorse, rutted roads, small manor houses nestled in oak groves, thatched cottages amid scrawny fields of rye and buckwheat ¹. » That is how Brittany was described at the end of the 18th century. At 2,000 leagues from Paris, it seemed even more cut off by time... according to a Member of the Convention Lesquinio ².

In those days, a stagecoach took five days to travel the 500 kilometers of bumpy roads that separated Paris from Vannes and required 35 changes of horses. Passengers stayed overnight at roadside inns.

Insurrection provoked by the Chouans, a resistance movement, still brewed from the Côtes d'Armor in the North to the Morbihan in the South. Under orders of their renowned general Georges Cadoudal, the Chouannerie in Morbihan - still rustic, rough, puritanical, had refusing to accept the constitutional clergy - had also just refused the amnesty offered by the First Consul (Napoleon) and continued the fighting. Now, Monseigneur de Pancemont, their new bishop, had just been recently appointed by the same Napoleon.

Vannes, on the Gulf coast

« A sober, serious, brooding city, still pulsating with its battles, its heroic deeds, its bereavement ... Vannes was locked up in its belt of crenelated ramparts flanked by towers and monumental gates. With its walls and its moats almost completely intact, its half-timbered houses inherited from the Middle Ages, all leaning on one another, Vannes seemed to seek shelter near the Saint-Pierre cathedral ³. »

The industrial revolution was soon going to transform the economy of the city, based, up to that point, on agriculture and fisheries. Trade in the port of Vannes diversified during the 19th century. The imports of raw cotton from England and coal from Wales were to be compensated by other exports.



¹ Hoesl, Paula, Madame molé de Champlâtreux, Spes, 1959, p.205

² Id. p. 203

³ Id. p. 218- 219

« Père Éternel »

In 1670, Jeanne de Quelen had bought—outside the city walls and beside today's « Rabine » - a dilapidated building to make into a monastery. Above the door she placed a low-relief representing the « Eternal Father » blessing the world. From this came the name adopted in popular parlance: « House of the Eternal Father. » At the time of the Revolution, the nuns were driven out of their convent. The House then became an « infamous den of iniquity ⁴. »

As soon as he arrived in Vannes in 1802, Monseigneur de Pancemont was struck by the misery and moral peril of so many young people at loose ends and left to themselves. With the funds given by Madame Molé, he bought the abandoned convent which stood next to his residence. He undertook needed repairs in order to set up textile workrooms that were already functioning when Madame Molé arrived in May 1803.

Maison du Père Éternel



⁴ Id. p.210

Monseigneur Antoine-Xavier Maynaud de Pancemont

Native of the Burgundy region and from an old and distinguished family of magistrates, Antoine-Xavier Maynaud de Pancemont was born in 1756 in Digoïn-sur-Loire, in the diocese of Autun, France. Young Antoine was a brilliant student who finished his philosophy courses at the age of fifteen. He then entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice and was ordained a priest in 1781.

Pastor of Saint-Sulpice

He was appointed pastor of the parish of Saint-Sulpice, Paris, in 1788. When he was presented to King Louis XVI on that occasion, the latter could not refrain from saying: « *They're doing it on purpose; this one is even uglier than the other one.* » But the new pastor made up for that humiliation by his zeal and his charity, particularly toward the poor. This was borne out in the harsh winter of 1788-1789. His organizational skills were effectively displayed in his parish where he opened charity schools and workrooms. He appealed to his well-heeled parishioners, among whom were Monsieur and Madame Molé.

Nonjuring Clergyman

In 1790, Father de Pancemont refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy which imposed upon bishops and priests alike a much too direct dependence on civil authorities. Like many others, he then suffered threats, exile, and had to find shelter in successive hiding places.

After the Revolution, Napoleon, now become First Consul, recognized his qualities as conciliator in the delicate negotiations for the Concordat with the Church. Consequently, he was appointed bishop of Vannes in Morbihan, a reputedly difficult diocese situated in one of the most troubled regions of France at that time. It was out of complete loyalty that Monseigneur de Pancemont then took the oath to the First Consul, seeing in him the restorer and protector of civil and religious peace.



*Monseigneur de Pancemont
Église St-Sulpice*

Bishop of Vannes 1802-1807

In 1802, Monseigneur de Pancemont took possession of his episcopal see. The dedication, solicitude and astuteness of the new bishop were appreciated in the diocese. His work of spiritual renewal, his compassion-filled ministry as well as the reorganization of the diocese undertaken since his arrival, all earned him esteem and affection. But he was judged to be too faithful to the Emperor, all the more so since the latter was meddling outrageously in Church matters. As a consequence, Monseigneur de Pancemont became a target of choice for one royalist faction.

On August 23, 1806, to keep one of their own from being condemned to death, some of these royalists took the bishop hostage on the road leading to Monterblanc, a parish in the diocese. After difficult negotiations, Monseigneur de Pancemont and his party regained their freedom. But this abduction affected him very much, perhaps more so because of the message they wanted to convey to him than by the circumstances of his abduction, harsh as these were. Nevertheless, this incident also proved to him that the people of Vannes for the great majority were fond of him: « I had hardly taken a hundred steps down the road than I saw coming to meet me the whole city of Vannes: men, women, children of all ages, of all conditions. Shouts of joy, screams of elation, tears of emotion on all faces ... That was the scene that met my eyes for the greater part of the way. Those held back by age or infirmity from coming to meet me were kneeling in front of the altars in all the churches that had been filled since the news of my hostage-taking got out ... I finally arrived in Vannes surrounded by this enormous crowd ... »



Ancien évêché

Coincidence or consequence? It is from this time that the health of Monseigneur de Pancemont began to deteriorate gradually, without however diminishing his vigorous spirit. On March 5, 1807, he was struck down by a general paralysis. He died on March 13th, at the age of fifty, having been a bishop for five years.

A spiritual experience embodied...

Every spirituality bears the imprint of the era in which it arose and of the person who initiated it. The many writings of Mother Saint-Louis bear witness, therefore, to a particular era, education, and life story. Revealing a certain vision of God, of humanity and of human relations, they belong to the 17th century spiritual current known by the name of the « French School of Spirituality. »

The vitality of this spiritual tradition has nurtured generations and has developed and deepened as it spread, being further enhanced by that very transmission.

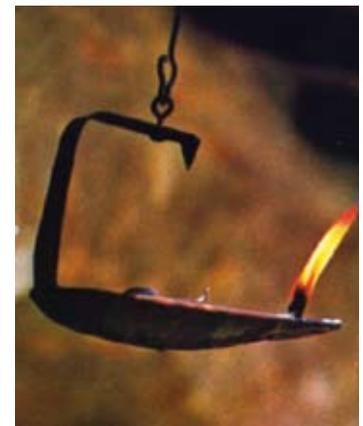
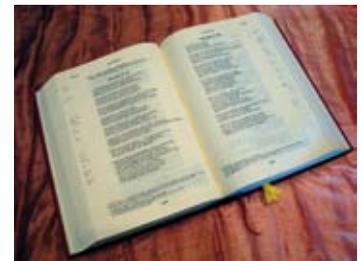
Attaining « the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ » Phil 3:8

« To know what you ought to be, it suffices to know what Jesus Christ was like ¹. » To know what one « ought to be ... », behind the starkness of these words there lies, for Mother Saint-Louis, her deep conviction that to attain « the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, » one has to obtain the necessary knowledge and be nourished by « the bread of life. »

It is in the daily and persevering contact with the Word of God that she encourages each sister to contemplate the image of the loving Father in Jesus so as to reveal him in their lives. « Sacred Scripture is the fundamental basis of all piety, and it must be above all else what nourishes the faithful Christian. Therefore, those who want to walk in the way of perfection must not let a single day pass without reading it and meditating on it ² ... »

In a conference on the Word of God, she does not separate the importance of Sacred Scripture from that of the Eucharist. « Perhaps it has never occurred to you, my dear daughters, that this word is food for the person just as the Holy Eucharist is food for the soul; it should be received and treated with the same dignity, the same respect. Have you ever thought about that ³...? »

As the Second Vatican Council said about the Church: « ... she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body ⁴, » so, all her life, Mother Saint-Louis worked hard to pass on to her sisters a great love for these two « tables », so fundamental to an understanding of the spiritual legacy she left us.



¹ Conférences spirituelles, p.234

² Mother Saint-Louis, Lettres, Vol. 1, p. 395

³ Conférences inédites, p.303

⁴ Vatican Council II, Dei Verbum, 21

Jesus, welcomed and served in every person we meet

For Mother Saint-Louis, each person, as the image and likeness of God, had the right to the same respect and the same consideration, no matter their social condition or origin. To her first sisters she wrote: « *if the care you give to these poor children were given in a spirit of living faith ... if the spirit of faith motivated you, it would no longer be the children you'd see, it would be Jesus Christ. You would say: I am with Jesus Christ, I speak with Jesus Christ, I live with Jesus Christ. ... For me, I glory in living with the poor and humble Jesus Christ* ⁵. » According to the spirit Mother Saint-Louis wished for her Institute, every sister was to keep in mind each person's dignity as son or daughter of God. Each sister should do all she can to work at restoring that dignity and be willing to improve the living conditions that no longer allow persons to have a voice or to be recognized.

Equipped with this spiritual heritage transmitted throughout generations, every Sister of Charity of Saint-Louis and all those who join them in sharing their charism know they are committed to living out daily this loving and respectful spiritual communion, in union with Christ, the Redeemer, thus mysteriously but truly continuing his saving work in the world.



A zeal grounded in God's own zeal

While fulfilling her role as spouse and mother, Madame Molé rooted her life ever more deeply in the contemplation of the life of Christ. Meditating on the Passion in difficult times, she felt an inner call to make a « Pact with the Cross of Jesus Christ. » Her entire life was to be marked by this sign of God's redeeming, unconditional and all-inclusive love for humanity.

In the face of hardships, she had to choose to love, to forgive, and God did the rest: « *The Holy Spirit has kindled within me an ardent fire of love,* ⁶ » she wrote. With Mary, « *constantly and lovingly attached to the foot of the Cross,* ⁷ » she wanted her own life and « *even her own death to be but one act of love* ⁸. » She reminded her sisters of the source that made this « rebirth » possible: the gift of the mercy of God. « *Let us be living witnesses of what his mercy can do for us and through us* ⁹ » she wrote.

⁵ Conférences spirituelles, p. 535

⁶ Mother Saint-Louis, Lettres, Vol. 1, p.59

⁷ Conférences spirituelles, p. 237

⁸ Mother Saint-Louis, Lettres, Vol. 1, p.597

⁹ Conférences spirituelles, p.537-538

Encouraging the first sisters to have « *a zeal that is grounded in God's zeal*, ¹⁰ » Mother Saint-Louis would always maintain an ardent desire to link the contemplation of Christ to the service of every person, whether near or far away. She gave a second purpose for her Congregation: praying for the « *conversion of sinners*. » God's will to save, like his mercy, could only be total and universal.

In a changing world, Mother Saint-Louis was able to offer all the resources of her heart, her mind, and her faith; all in the service of humankind which, yesterday as well as today, « *has been groaning in labour pains* ¹¹. » In it, she discovered Christ in the mystery of his death, but also in that of his resurrection and new life.

« *Neither people nor books can teach us (...) how great the delights and the holy joy of a soul who has chosen God for her portion* ¹² ... »

It is this same joy that is offered and promised to every disciple.

*La misère le malheur
 devient si tellement accablés qu'ils
 semblent être pour ainsi dire insupportable
 c'est à vous à reparer au sein ce malheur
 et à faire remonter dans leur cœur
 par votre secours votre charité les
 sentiments que l'exercice de leurs maux*

¹⁰ Conférences spirituelles, p. 491

¹¹ Rm 8: 22

¹² Conférences spirituelles, p.379

1^o vous êtes chargés du soin de leur esprit pour leur donner l'instruction nécessaire pour leur apprendre à connaître & à aimer & servir Dieu par la pratique de notre sainte religion, & cette instruction vous devez encore joindre celle qui leur est nécessaire pour être utiles à la société donc ils sont membres dans la classe ou la divine providence les a placés. rien de votre part ne doit être négligé pour développer leurs intelligences ouvrir leur esprit à la lumière former leur raison. cette faculté de l'esprit et de la raison n'est elle pas la plus belle la plus utile de toutes celles que Dieu nous a données et si il est un devoir pour chaque un de nous de ne pas enfoncer un talent aussi précieux il n'est pas moins commandé à ceux qui sont chargés du soin de la jeunesse de ne rien négliger pour lui en faire connaître le prix et la mettre à portée d'en faire un bon usage dans toute sa vie. c'est l'instruction et la culture de l'esprit et de la raison pour les plus grands services de charité que l'on puisse rendre à ces pauvres enfants et ceux auxquels nous devons nous porter avec le plus de zèle.

Education, a mission

God is waiting for you to begin his work ¹. » In these words, Madame Molé received the mission that would be hers and that of the Institute she was founding: education, « the most interesting and difficult adventure in life ². » In her Conferences to the first Sisters, she would never cease to remind them of the demands of their educational mission.

Awakening and nurturing ...

For the poor and idle forlorn girls loitering on the quayside, she opened workrooms where cotton was woven, a lace-making facility and a school. Her plan: the comprehensive formation of each young person accepted as a unique individual. According to Gospel values, the sisters would provide knowledge, know-how, interpersonal skills, and set guidelines; at the same time they would instruct and educate. These were the various aspects she would develop in her numerous talks to her first sisters.



« You are responsible for the care of their minds, the care of their hearts and the care of their bodies ... You must care for their minds by giving them the necessary instruction, teaching them to know, love and serve God by the practice of our holy religion. To this instruction, you must also add what they need to become useful members of the society to which they belong ... Nothing must be neglected on your part to develop their intelligence, enlighten their minds and form their conscience ³. »

¹ Lettre de Monseigneur de Pancemont, April 3 , 1803 in lettres, Vol. 1, p. 546

² Benedict XVI, « Educating Young People in Justice and Peace », Message for the World Day of Peace, 2012

³ Conférences spirituelles, 1803, p.10

Education is never separated from the promotion of justice.

« ... The last thing that perfect justice requires of us is to have compassion for the poor and to help them in any way we can, in their needs and requirements, and this work of mercy is of strict justice ... if our situation does not allow us to give alms of the material kind, we must do it with our spiritual resources ... simply from the principle of charity ⁴ ... »

Mother Saint-Louis encourages attitudes and a state of mind that should guide every person who dedicates herself to education. She strongly emphasizes this acceptance and respect for everyone, paying particular attention to the underprivileged.

« Does it seem as if poverty and misfortune have crushed all feeling and sensitivity out of them? Then it is up to you to rectify that sad state of affairs and revive in them, by your gentleness and charity, those feelings that were stifled in them by an overdose of ills, as it were, before they were able to develop fully ⁵ ... »

Fostering confidence and responsiveness, linking firmness to kindness ...

If education means helping a person grow to maturity, « this process is fostered by the encounter of two freedoms, that of adults and that of the young ⁶. » Mother Saint-Louis knew from experience that formation towards autonomy, towards developing an enquiring mind and taking responsibility, works by fostering confidence which encourages responsiveness.

« Let us look upon them as our own children; let us have truly maternal feelings for them ... May everything come from our heart. Let us link firmness to kindness: kindness alone can turn into weakness; firmness alone can degenerate into hardness ... Alas, I know, sometimes their crudeness, their ingratitude, the little benefit they seem to derive from our efforts: everything can discourage us and even drive us away; but the true charity of Jesus Christ is never deterred ⁷ ... Study the character of your children, try hard to gain their confidence ⁸ ... »

Mother Saint-Louis also tried to develop with the parents a relationship based on mutual confidence. She knew that any educational endeavour could only succeed with their active participation: they were the first educators of their children.

⁴ Conférences spirituelles, p. 356

⁵ Id., p. 498

⁶ Benedict XVI, « Educating Young People in Justice and Peace », Message for the World Day of Peace, 2012

⁷ Conférences spirituelles, p.356

⁸ Marquis de Ségur, Vie de Madame Molé, 2^e édition, Paris, Bray et Rétaux, 1830, p. 137



« And you, mothers who are listening to me, I believe you are aware of all the good we want for your children ... Yes, you can be sure that we will do everything for their greatest good. But are you going to let us do it all by ourselves? No, surely not; help us any way you can ⁹ ... »

Passing it on ...

To educate means allowing others to own, as heritage, the values shared by past generations and passed on to become the basics for one's new structures, be they personal, social or spiritual. « For this reason, today more than ever, we need authentic witnesses and not simply people who parcel out rules and facts ... A witness is someone who first lives the life that is proposed to others ¹⁰. » Mother Saint-Louis said no less:

« The first preoccupation of a person in charge of children's education should be to exercise self-control. Your example will do more for a child than all your talking. Children must see in your person and conduct the very virtues you want to develop in them ¹¹. »

These words may be those of yesterday but their implication is always current. To educate people for their own sake, to educate them as the unique individuals they are makes them bearers of transcendence in an environment beset by contrary winds; it is always the same mission to be lived out in creative fidelity.

« Today the world needs educators who are able to help men and women give meaning to their existence and who involve them in building more just and friendly societies where everyone will be recognized and accepted in their dignity as children of God. The Church counts on you to be especially present among the poor, the builders of this renewed world that Christ came to inaugurate in our humanity ¹². »

⁹ Unpublished document : Talk at the school opening for poor children, ACLR, # 302

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, « Educating Young People in Justice and Peace », Message for the World Day of Peace, 2012

¹¹ Unpublished Conference 1806, Advice relating to education, p. 217

¹² John Paul II, Audience given to the General administration of the Sisters of Charity of St. Louis, July 9, 1996

A shared charism ...

« ...if the grain of wheat dies, it bears much fruit. »
(Jn. 12:24-25)



A grain of wheat ... an ear ... a sheaf ...

A foundress ... a Congregation ... a great spiritual family ...

This comparison is a good illustration for our topic. The preceding pages have described an exceptional woman who, at age 40, sacrificed all – her social rank, her wealth, her family, even her attraction for the contemplative life – in order to answer a more urgent need of the Church in Vannes, Morbihan: the education of neglected youth. Like the grain of wheat sown into the earth, the dream sacrificed by Louise-Élisabeth bore fruit and gave birth to an Institute that came to the aid of poor and neglected girls. Over the years, this congregation spread out to become a flourishing sheaf.

In 1967, Sisters from the Congregation of Our Lady of Compassion joined the Sisters of Charity of Saint Louis. A similar devotion to the loving presence of Our Lady the Compassion at the foot of the Cross of her Son, Christ the Redeemer, first led to friendly relations and then to the merger of the two Institutes.

From the 1970's on, the Congregation began to share its charism – a gift of God to the Church – with the laity, by way of different forms of association: persons associated by annual written commitments or by prayer, partners in Congregational works, members of the « Louis » family, volunteers.

The fire that Christ came to cast upon the earth was kindled in the heart of Mother Saint-Louis by the Holy Spirit. Since 1803, this same fire has spread throughout the Congregation. As Pope Paul VI said, « our world has more need of credible witnesses than of teachers ». Mother Saint-Louis is, undoubtedly, such a witness, a sign for our world today. She attracts hundreds of persons in her wake, eager to live by the charism that she bequeathed to the Congregation. Her example of compassion and her desire to create a better world still speaks to families and individuals today.

The grain of wheat planted into the earth in 1803 has borne fruit and produced a hundredfold ... it has germinated and multiplied. The storm that swept over the Church in France at the opening of the 20th century caused this fruitful « grain » from Brittany to be replanted in other countries, and to produce an abundant harvest. Today, many people bear witness to the exemplary life of Mother Saint-Louis and how she is, for them, a source of inspiration.

Testimonies

Mother Saint-Louis inspires us in so many respects. Nevertheless, it is her surrender to the will of God that challenges us the most. So many generous « Yes » and that from her youth onward. Day after day, she invites us to adopt these same attitudes of heart, to arrive at that surrender in our daily living. **G. and L.**

For me, this extraordinary woman is an example of great faith, of generosity, of love and of dedication. Whenever I encounter fear and when I go through difficult times, I think of this woman who endured so many trials in her life with courage and love. It helps me keep hoping and believing in life. **N.B.**

It is through grace that Mother Saint-Louis had the Holy Name of Jesus written in her heart. This devotion played a very big role in her life, in her religious and apostolic commitments. That speaks very strongly to us. How we wish that devotion would stay with us day and night. Knowing that it was through the Word of God that the Holy Name of Jesus was revealed to her, we draw from that same source of strength. We find peace and comfort in it. **L. and N.**

Mother Saint-Louis is a companion on my life's journey. Her charisma helps me carry my crosses, by giving them over to Christ, the Redeemer; she supports me in the help I give to persons in need and inspires me to do more to make Jesus known to the children in catechism class. And so, I can be a living stone in the Church. **H.T.**

This lover of Jesus is an example to me to persevere daily in doing little things. She lived her life as wife, mother, and religious so well, in spite of so many obstacles. The statement she made one day, « Everything is great when it is done through love, » has helped me when enthusiasm is lacking or lethargy threatens to take over. **M.L.**

In the various stages of her life, Mother Saint-Louis is a source of inspiration to me. She wasn't only a religious, but a wife and mother like me. My husband and I want to follow her way in working for the glory of God by helping troubled children, by praying in the name of Jesus for mothers in distress, for disaffected youth, and by loving the Blessed Virgin standing at the foot of the cross of her Son. **A mother of a family.**

Testimonies

Mother Saint-Louis inspires us in our life as a couple by the love, respect and admiration that she and her husband had for each other. Monsieur Molé accepted wholeheartedly that his wife continue her works of charity. On her part, she appreciated her husband's goodness, and his loving and generous heart. **R. and R. C.**

For ten years now, Mother Saint-Louis has been part of my life. She gives me counsel when I have to make important decisions. She gives me guidance on how to conduct myself towards my children. She is close to me in prayer, helping me trust in her Jesus crucified. **I.C.**

Following Mother Saint-Louis and her example enables me to express attitudes of compassion, respect and of attentiveness toward people around me: members of my family, the destitute, the voiceless and the ordinary people. **N.T.**

As an associate with the SCSL, I am often energized and inspired by the life of our foundress. That is then transferred to my volunteer involvement with the disadvantaged as well as with those organizations that have education as their primary mission. **G.T.**

Ever since I became an associate with the SCSL, the course of my life has changed. My volunteering in all sorts of fields is no longer just an everyday activity but truly a way of carrying out an apostolic ministry after the example of Mother Saint-Louis. **G.C.**

Mother Saint-Louis entered my life at a time when I was really in despair: I was a burden on my wife and children. However, my wife never condemned me. I began to understand that she drew her strength and goodness from the spirituality of this foundress. Then when I became a prayer associate, I let myself be taught by Mother Saint-Louis. I am certain that she is teaching me how to love others with a generous heart and to place all the burdens of my everyday existence into the Heart of Jesus. Thank you to Mother Saint-Louis for having turned my life around. **H-P L**

Just like this woman of interior life, I put the Eucharist at the centre of my life. In my daily Mass, I offer myself along with all my children and grandchildren, all they are and all they do. I am convinced that the Lord knows how to reach them, as he knows best.
R-A. P.

The more I get to know her, the more she inspires me. She spread love, kind-heartedness and compassion. She drew her strength and faithfulness from her time with God which continued into her encounters with the poor. What is very evident is her desire to educate for the purpose of making people better able to take charge of their lives. What a beautiful model she offers us! **L.D.**

This great lady inspires me as wife, mother and citizen. She devoted time to prayer, to the Word of God and to the Eucharist, all the while not neglecting her responsibilities. Like her, I want to live in love by giving my time to help relieve the distress of people in need. **R.M.**

In the difficulties of my family life, I can identify with Mother Saint-Louis when she calls herself a « Daughter of the Cross. » I let myself be inspired by her courage in the trials of life and her desire to « want only what God wants. » **D.C.**

Our school bases itself on the charism of Mother Saint-Louis who, by way of her writings, shows us powerfully how essential these intellectual, emotional and educational foundations are. Her insights as a wife and mother, her deep faith as a religious woman, these are for us the fertile paradigm that helps us give meaning to our profession.

Mme D.

We approach our work, our mission to the young people confided to us, with the same conviction, the same determination and the same patience which Mother Saint-Louis exemplified in her time, in the belief that everyone is teachable. **MJ.L**

Témoignages

When I think of Madame Molé, I see a woman in her totality: as a loving spouse, a mother of a family and faithful friend sustained by the love of God; a go-getter, disciplined, but also cheerful and charming. She accompanied, assisted, and provided a safe haven for many a troubled youth which continues to be a need today. **C. R.**

The vision of Elizabeth House was inspired by the foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Saint-Louis, Louise-Élisabeth Molé. She was called to have a special concern for young persons in difficulty; thus she opened a home and her heart to the poor homeless girls of Van-nes, Morbihan, France, back in the 19th century. Elizabeth House was also inspired by the gospel story in Luke 1. Like Elizabeth we welcome the young pregnant « Mary's » into our house and try to meet their material, psychological and spiritual needs.

We are not just involved in meeting the physical needs of the young women who walk through our door; our responsibility is so much more: we're ultimately involved in matters of the heart and soul. Our responsibility is to love and care for these young women and their children, without condition, through any circumstance, so that ultimately when they leave our care, in addition to the skills learned and tools acquired, they will have experienced what it is to be loved.

Former boarders have written: « You had totally made a big impact in our lives. We will never forget your generosity ... I thank you for everything: for listening to whatever I had to say patiently and for caring about us. We are so lucky to know you ... It is a blessing to have you in our lives. You have made things better and you have given us strength and hope during this difficult period ... » **C. H.**

The living conditions of many young people in our area were and are still appalling: broken families, limited financial resources, almost total absence of any faith education. Since 1990, in close collaboration with the SCSL, several adults and some young people have become involved in an evangelization ministry, inspired by the spirit and charism of the foundress. After the example of Mother Saint-Louis, volunteers are seeking out ways and means of responding better to the needs of these young people and needy families. Our get-togethers are sources of inspiration, commitment and personal development. **G. and C.L.**

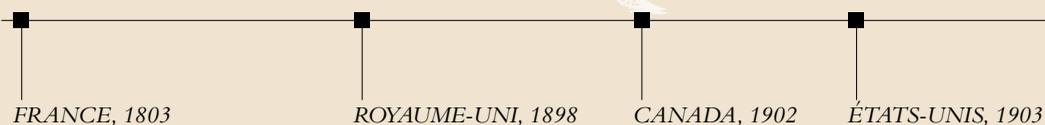
Together, we, Sisters of Charity of Saint-Louis and our lay partners, continue this « work of charity » that took root in Vannes and is scattered over three continents. According to their state of life, in their own way, these partners deepen and revitalize their insights, and so enlarge an already impressive sheaf. All these persons have grasped that this woman, herself bruised by life, chose « out of mercy and justice, to heal a wounded humanity. » That is why they commit themselves, like Mother Saint-Louis, « to reach out with concrete efforts of solidarity and sharing, of hope and forgiveness that manifest the compassion of the Father and the joy of salvation. »

si leur est nécessaire pour être utile à la société
 sous ils sont membres dans la classe ou la divine
 providence les a placés. rien de votre part
 ne doit être négligé pour développer leur
 intelligence servir leur esprit à la lumière
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 plus utile de toutes celles que Dieu nous a do
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 former un talent aussi précieux
 que celui de ceux qui

*« Serait-il donc
que vous nous appelleriez à fonder dans
nous serions appelées*

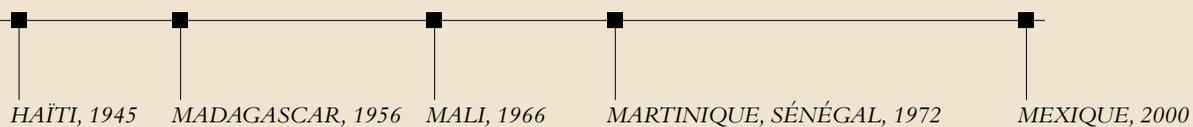


Par-delà les frontières...



*vrai, ô mon Dieu,
divers climats de ces asyles de charité :
à ce genre d'apostolat »*

Jean St Louis



« Our love of God and neighbour commits us to reach out with concrete efforts of solidarity and sharing, of hope and forgiveness that manifest the compassion of the Father and the joy of salvation.
» Rule of Life



« No, it does not suffice for a soul consumed by divine love ... to savour all its sweetness; it must also be spread abroad. »
Conference Mother Saint-Louis p.534

« As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world ... I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. » Jn 17,18,26



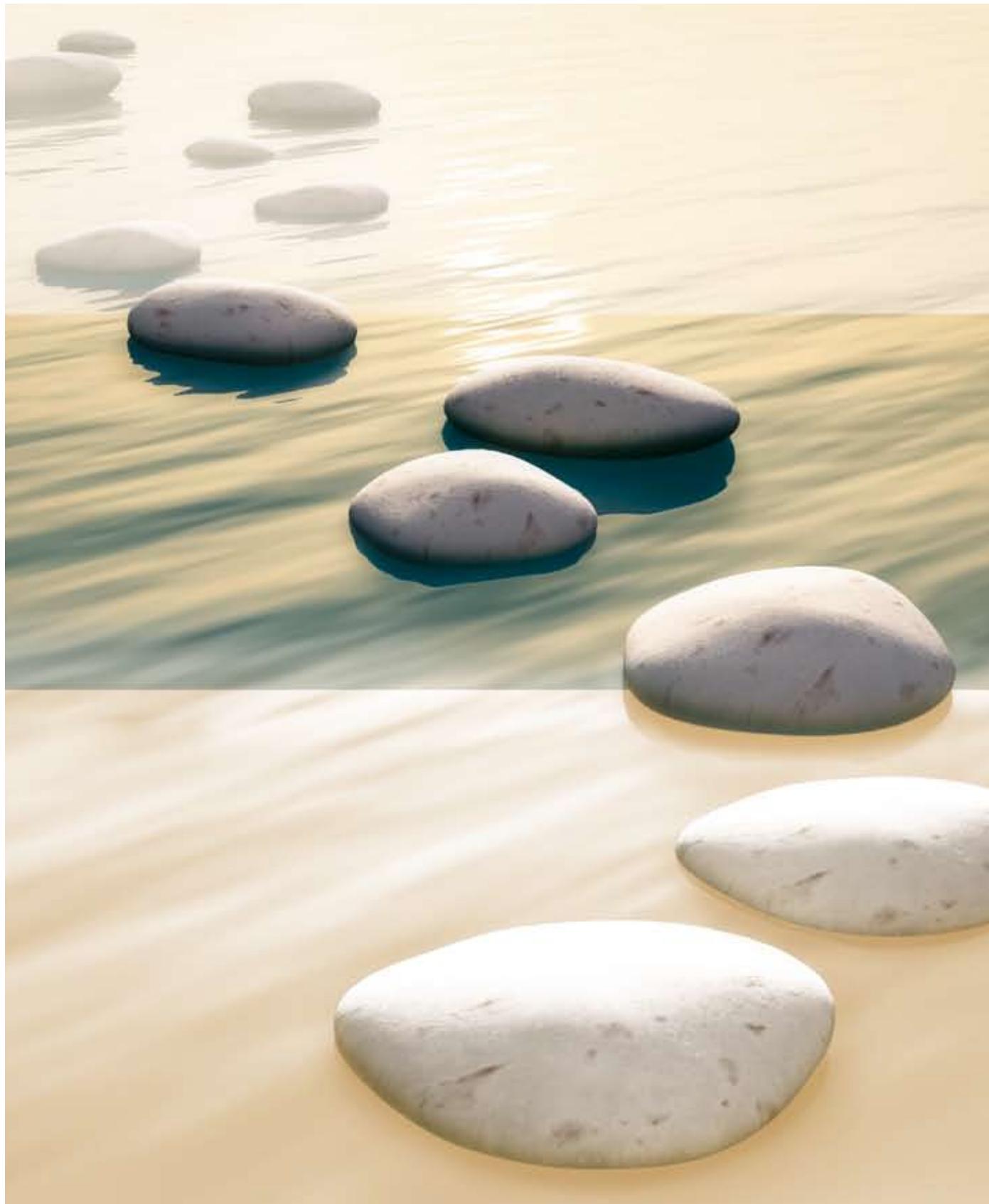
« We continue to give life to the foundational charism by our fidelity to our original gospel inspiration, the authenticity of our consecrated lives, and our bold response to the needs of the Church and the world. »
Rule of Life

Listening to the Spirit...

When highlighting the human and spiritual itinerary of the saints and blessed, the Church does not present them as models for us to imitate. They themselves, together, highlight the diversified face of another, Christ himself, the only true model. The Church presents them as brothers and sisters in humanity who let themselves be fashioned by the very face of Christ which they long contemplated. With Him and in Him, they discovered and developed their true identity, that of sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of all, men and women of peace and reconciliation « in the image and likeness of God. »

« *The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound.* » (Jn 3: 8) Today like yesterday, the Spirit is at work in the world and dwells in the heart of each one of us. In the heart of men and women who allow the Spirit to guide them, so as to awaken in them, new energies to respond to the needs of their contemporaries, thus truly bearing witness to the Good News of the Gospel.

« The lives of the saints are not limited to their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints, one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from humans, but rather become truly close to them. » (Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas, # 42).



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