I. THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN 19TH CENTURY FRANCE

Submissive to men, little recognition of their value
The predominance of the man is implied by the very constitution of his being.....The obedience of the woman is homage given to the power that protects her. Portalis (One of the editors of the Civil Code)

A married woman
could not sign an agreement, nor accept an artistic engagement, nor exercise a separate profession, nor appear as a witness, nor obtain any official paper without the authorization of her husband. If she worked, her salary belonged to her husband. The adultery of a spouse was punishable (3 months to two years in prison). The infraction for the husband only existed if he had a relationship with a woman in a place that could be considered as his home and even then, he would simply be fined. The husband had the right of control over his wife’s correspondence; he could have his wife’s letters delivered to him, open them and destroy them (this was the case up until 1958).
The Code of 1804 maintained the principle of divorce but with an assortment of difficulties: it was abolished in 1816 and re-established in 1884...

The young girl had no protection at all,
Adult at 21 years – marriage permitted at 15 years.

From the age of 15, the young girl alone was responsible for her honour. She could not complain about having been seduced, even by a man who might be old, rich and a notorious debauchee; even at 15, she was the one who was supposed to have done the seducing. The go-between or procurer – for those under 21 years of age – was not punished if it was something they did habitually (Penal Code #34)
Rape was more sanctioned – Hard labour for rape of a young girl under 15 years old – but the girl had to prove that she had been raped. Dr. Fodéré was of the opinion that a girl, whose whole body was bruised, could very well have given herself the bruises.
A promise of marriage was null, even when written, dated and signed – while a promise of sale was equivalent to the sale itself.¹

¹ Laugier Odile, Le Purgatoire des femmes au 19ème siècle, Angers, manuscript, p. 4-5
OVER TO YOU:
A famous French painter: Courbet was asked to delete his friend’s wife from a family portrait….”in order that the spectators' viewing not be distracted…..” Would you like to know this story? And…. Baudelaire’s scornful attitude towards women? Consult the supporting document.

Access to education

At the very beginning of the century (1801), a certain Sylvain Maréchal introduced a law “bearing on the forbidding of teaching women to read”. In 1892, 10 women presented themselves for the baccalaureate, at the end of their secondary studies. These two facts illustrate the progress made.

In the first half of the century, for the bourgeoisie, as for the aristocracy, the instruction of girls without the family was confided to religious congregations or to private tutors.

As Louis de Bonald declared in the assembly in 1816:
The education of young women must not be the same as that of young men, because they have not received the same destination from nature. Everything in their instruction must be directed towards domestic usefulness, as everything in the instruction of young men must be directed towards public usefulness.

The position is clear: the nature of women “vows” them to the duty of serving their family, their husband and their children. It is a case of them of transmitting a learned knowledge, not creating, reflecting or innovating.

From this sprang several consequences:
- Delay in the creation of primary schools: in 1833 for boys and 1850 for the girls living in communes of more than 800 inhabitants. As always, the putting into effect of this law was done very progressively.
- Or secondary. The Camille Sée law of 1880 opened secondary education to girls, but prevented them from taking the baccalaureate because certain obligatory subjects did not figure on their programme. Thus, young girls could not move to higher studies. Schools had to give their pupils a good general culture but not a career. Julie Daubié, the first woman to present herself for the baccalaureate in 1861 prepared for it on her own. After several refusals, she obtained the right to enter for the exams through the personal intervention of the Empress Eugénie.
- Discrimination in scholastic programmes: latin and the sciences were forbidden to young girls.
- Discrimination in the training of teachers. The first normal senior school opened in 1881 and the first female lycee in 1892. The programme and examination materials were different from those of male teacher training schools.

2 Laugier Odile, La Femme Française au 19ème siècle, Angers, maunscript p. 9-10
Health Aspect

One consequence of worker poverty was the impossibility of assuring normal living conditions for the children. There was a whole miserable chain from abortion, infanticide and abandonment, to forced work and delinquency.

Abortions and infanticides were in fact punished quite lightly by a Justice that recognized widely attenuating circumstances. Society considered abortion a necessary evil. Even more when it was a question of a girl mother, rejected or at the very least scorned. There was much neo-natal and child fatality. This is not surprising given that maternity hospitals did not yet exist. Most often, births took place at the worker’s home, with the help of a “matron” who did not cost anything and was more devoted than expert.

The physiological destitution was great: overcrowding in unhealthy localities, absence of bodily hygiene, hereditary illnesses or epidemics, mediocre nourishment…everything conspired to make existence very difficult.

Abandonment of children was frequent, around hospices or quite simply in the street. These “abandoned” children became the “found children” in hospices or with wet-nurses. France counted 116,000 of them in 1824 and 127,000 in 1834.3

Cramped housing did not allow any possibility of cooking facilities. They were nourished on milk and bread, on average a kilo of bread per day per person. The hospital reports list dysentery as the primary cause of death.

The average life span for women was 37 to 39 years, with great local differences: 28 years in Paris and 45 years in l’Hérault, and in other departments of low birth rate. The graph of the average life span is practically the inverse of the graph of the birth rate.

A lot of deaths during labour, a lot of child deaths too. For every 100 babies born, only 55 reached the age of 5.4

As for women victims of prostitutions, the most difficult part of the regulation was the obligatory health check: prostitution was closely associated to hygiene and to illness, whether it was from the point of view of the prostitutes or that of public opinion: a woman became a prostitute officially as soon as she presented herself for the medical appointments….If worry about morals was weak, the fear of venereal disease was constant.

Before 1850, his health control required three or four visits per month. Every girl diagnosed as sick (and they all were at some time or another) was arrested by an administrative police measure and brought to the prison hospice to be treated until she was cured. There was confusion between treatment and prison, but it must be said that

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3 Marie-Antoinette PECARD, La Mission Apostolique du Bon Pasteur, Recherches historiques, Spirituality Centre, Angers Mother House, 1994 p. 29
4 Laugier Odile, La femme française au 19ème siècle, manuscript, p. 5,7
the hospitals most often refused these admissions. At La Flèche, the regulations of 1858 refuse admittance to “girl mothers, women in childbirth, those with syphilis, ringworm and the incurables”… Now, the principal motive for these arrests was venereal disease, but also scabies (about one in 15) or ringworm.⁵

Life and working conditions

The woman in the rural areas led a dog’s life. With rudimentary means, she took part in all the work in the fields. If, for example, the sickle was kept for a long time in preference to the scythe, it was so that the women could harvest. After having worked in the fields, she ate standing up while serving the men.⁶

In rural France that still supported one Frenchman in two, the woman gave herself, especially in the agricultural “dead season” over to a form of domestic work (spinning, weaving…) reconcilable with maternal and household tasks.

The big town was the centre of attraction for the paid farm workers who emigrated: they came to augment the ranks of a proletariat in full expansion and reinforce “the heavy domestic phenomenon; in 1866, in Paris there was around one domestic for three workers.⁷

Domestic work, by proposing a substitute for the family cell, attracted them⁸ The conditions were not wonderful: unlimited work time, food that was inferior to that of their masters. The maid’s room under the eaves was an invention of the time. And servant girls were exposed to seduction by their masters…⁹

Another employment offered to young women, to young mothers, was to offer themselves as wet nurses in a bourgeoisie family. The custom was for the unweaned child to be raised, not by its mother but by a wet nurse. A double movement would develop throughout this 19th century that would expand towards the countryside: the babies from the towns or, in reverse, the more fortunate families would bring the wet nurses from the provinces into their homes.

The urban middle classes, but also progressively the working classes, crowded into the big towns, sent their children to wet nurses in the country where they sometimes grew and often died. Simultaneously, the bourgeoisie of these same towns, enlightened by their family doctors about the dangers of sending out to wet nurses, recruited wet nurses from the rural world for their babies. It is a question here of an “industry”, prosperous and little regulated.

⁵ Pécard, Marie-Antoinette, rgs, op.cit, p.24
⁶ Laugier Odile, La femme au 19 siècle, p.4
⁷ La vie quotidienne des domestiques en France au XIX siècle, Paris 1978, quoted by Pécard, op. cit, p. 19
⁹ Pécard, ibid, p. 19
The separation of the couple was aggravated by the presence of a new born infant dependent on the husband who remained in the village. The baby was fed with soup; while the father was at work, it was hung in a tree in a sort of hammock to protect it from animals...the father lived in great solitude, as did his wife. The young mother was close to the masters but without belonging to the family. Neither was she a domestic and these were jealous of her because she was dispensed from heavy work, well nourished and surround by care. But the wet nurse was closely watched; lost all personal life.

Added to this, the negotiations at the time of the employment by the intermediary of the “leaders” was the occasion of sordid financial trafficking.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{OVER TO YOU:}

Research for more information on the travelling conditions and lodgings of women wet nurses and children. You can consult the supporting document.

But the movement from traditional work at home, to work in a factory became inescapable.

The working woman, in town could work in a family enterprise, i.e. at home or she was a factory worker. In either case, the working day was excessively long, its length often dictated by the hours of daylight. In 1892, night work was forbidden to women and in 1910 the working day for women was reduced to 10 hours per day. Tailors, embroiders, weaver, the woman was paid by task, i.e. piece work.

The female worker had no social benefits: neither holiday nor maternity leave; no sick pay, no pension, no insurance in case of accident, no family allowance for the number of children, and always half the man’s salary.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{OVER TO YOU:}

Draw a parallel between the situation of women today in your country and that which we have just presented.

\section*{II. MARY EUPHRASIA’S VIEW AND RESPONSE}

1. Faced with a “chauvinist” world that did not recognise the value of women enough, Mary Euphrasia:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Recognised and valued her own feminine being
  \item Gave women value in their own eyes and in society.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{10} Laugier Odile, \textit{La Femme française au 19\textsuperscript{e} siècle}, p. 4-5
\textsuperscript{11} Laugier Odile, \textit{La femme française au 19\textsuperscript{e} siècle}, p. 4-6
Mary Euphrasia recognised and valued her own feminine being
In the testimonies of the Ordinary Process of Beatification and in her letters we see how Mary Euphrasia was capable of recognizing her own values and capacities and to act in all freedom: Louis Brémond tells us:
‘I took the liberty of saying to her: ‘Your work still lacks one thing: Our Lord must give to the general abbesses the power to say mass and to give absolution. I see that only these two things are lacking to you’. This pleasantry which might have upset any other woman, was accepted by her with a calm smile and full of good grace"12

She used the right given by Rome:
Mary Euphrasia wrote to Mgr. Blanc, Bishop of New Orleans, Louisiana, (USA): “I will admit to your Lordship that I do not often use the right that His Holiness has given me in article three of this Brief and that, in like cases, we have always had recourse to Rome. But for a Father such as you, Monsignor, I cannot agree quickly enough to all that your Lordship has the goodness to request.”13

She encouraged the Ecclesiastical Superior to use the Newspaper so as to avoid being duped.
“I can easily affirm for you, and I would be happy if you would have it put in the paper, that it is completely false that the Ladies of the Good Shepherd make no collections…It is a bad joke that is being played on us for the second time…I know the individual…and more, I am afraid that we are the victims of some fraud! I will give you the explanation of this issue!”14

Mary Euphrasia gave the woman value in her own eyes and in society:
She openly expressed her admiration for certain intelligent and saintly women, or for someone who was sick: three examples among many:
• St. Teresa of Avila: We read in the Ordinary Process: “It was the Servant of God herself who recounted that having read the life of St. Teresa she felt a great devotion for the holy reformer of Carmel and that this devotion inspired in her the desire to bear her name in religion…”15
• She thus introduced Mary of St. Teresa de Schorlemer to the Bishop of New Orleans (USA):
“The new Superior, that we dare to recommend to the indulgent goodness of your generous heart, Sr. Mary of St. Teresa de Schorlemer, was for several years in Bangalore, where, through her industry and intelligent labour, she managed to found a flourishing house that continues to console us by the good it does everywhere.”16

12 Procès Ordinaire de Canonisation de Marie-Euphrasie (PO), Witness Louis Brémond, p. 1005
14 Mary Euphrasia, letter No: 1698 to M. Leboucher, Saturday, 21st April 1860
15 Procès Ordinaire, Witness: Mary of St. Augustine Fernandez Concha, p. 384
16 Mary Euphrasia, Letter No: 1786, to Mgr. Odin, 2nd June 1864
A sick sister: Sr. Melanie Bahuaud seemed to have gone mad: she ran away, she hid in the cellar or the attic, no longer wanting anything. The sisters were exasperated....Mary Euphrasia wrote: “Poor Mary of St. Melanie’s state can only be the result of sickness or violent headaches for assuredly, she is not a bad religious; here, we saw her constantly virtuous, mortified, regular, obedient and in the world, she enjoyed an excellent reputation. All that does not diminish your difficulties my very dear daughters, but only justifies the one we are complaining about. I never meant to give you such a heavy burden; today, as in the past, I only want to relieve you. I feel it is urgent that this poor Melanie be taken from you, for the good of the foundation. This, my good St. Sophie (the Superior) is what we want you to do...” Mary Euphrasia then advises that Melanie be confided to the care of two postulants who were going to Angers and she wrote: “I will receive all three of them with equal tenderness, but especially the sick one who has never been more in need of a mother, never has she been dearer to me!”

She supported the Sisters in resisting unjust claims: “Always intrepid, supporting her daughters and showing them, in the cross, the whole future of their house... ‘Oh my very dearly loved daughters, don’t leave your post! Firmly refuse the administration, the shameful regulations and their beautiful conditions, but stay in Munich, try to be free and poor, if God wills!”

Mary Euphrasia recognized every woman’s value:

a. Indian women

“Would you also tell us about the first two American penitents you receive, tell me their names, what they look like, their size?... Tell us about these two dearly beloved children”

b. Black women

“The Servant of God’s compassionate charity towards black women was unlimited. She recounted: ‘How many times...on the island where I was born (Noirmoutier) I heard talk about the slave trade, about this odious trafficking! These tales broke my heart’

“The Servant of God’s courageous zeal extended to the African slaves and she sent a circular to the diverse houses of the Congregation promoting the redemption of slaves in Egypt.”

c. Handicapped women

A young deaf and dumb woman tells us: “I knew the Servant of God personally in 1828. It was at the Refuge in Tours where I was a boarder. The famous Sr.

17 Mary Euphrasia, Letter No: 2283 to Mary of St. Sophie Lavoye, 19th December 1835
18 Letter to SMJ of the Cross David, 8th July 1849, quoted by M. of St. A. Fernandez Concha, P.O. p. 530-531
19 Letter from Mary Euphrasia to Mary of the Angels Porcher, January 1843, quoted by MSAFC. P.O. p. 461
20 Ordinary Process of Canonisation of MEP, Witness, MSAFC, p. 486
21 Ibid p. 530 – 531
Rosalie, from Paris, with the intention of being kind, had sent me to Tours to the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. The Servant of God offered them to take me as a boarder in the house where she was superior. I was responsible for watching over the little girls, most of whom were orphans. I stayed about four years in this house. I have seen the Servant of God, who had trouble remembering me, but was glad to see me again when she recognized me, three or four times in passing since then. It was her I approached in order to come to Angers, asking her to ask Mme Victoire Blouin, a religious and directress of the establishment for the deaf and dumb, at Millepieds, near Angers, to take me as she had promised.  

**d. women of humble condition**

**Her nurse Moïse:** Mother Mary of St. Augustine Fernandez Concha testifies to her love for Moïse, the good servant who brought her up as a child.  

She recommended us insistently to be good and charitable to the parents of the poorest children in the house.  

The wife of the carrier testifies:  "I frequently saw the Servant of God in the parlour. I remember that she was very gracious to me and several times did me the honour of embracing me. We remained in contact, more or less frequently throughout her whole life. The worthy religious’ time seemed to me so precious, that I had a sort of scruple about causing her to waste it by my visits. Several times I was invited to religious celebrations at the Good Shepherd. I heard the Servant of God spoken about, especially by the religious when they were taking the coach; we took them to a separate waiting room. I remember that several cried, and when we asked them what was making them cry, the lay sisters replied: “They are crying because they are leaving more than their parents, they are leaving their good Mother”  

**e. Women scorned by society, prisoners:**

Mary Euphrasia wrote to Sr. Mary of St. Stanislas BEDOUET, Superior in Poitiers: “…Next Wednesday, seven other saints will leave to found a new House in Suben (Austria) and work for the salvation of the 300 charming prisoners”.  

**f. And all women and young girls**

“In my dealings with her, I noticed that she loved her sisters, the classes of children and young girls and her monasteries, the poor; and I saw that this love was without partiality towards anyone.”  

2. Faced with the conditions of scorn, poverty and distress....of the women: Mary Euphrasia: listened to them; cared for them physically and spiritually; forgave them; showed them affection

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22 Ordinary Process of Canonisation of MEP, Witness Josephine Martin, p. 1046  
23 Cf. P.O. Witness, MSAFC, p. 377  
24 P.O. Witness, Mary of St. Peter de Coudenhove, p. 118  
25 P.O. Witness, Marie-Alexandrine Bertin, p. 966  
26 Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, Letter 1539  
27 P.O. Witness, Sr. Marie Caroline Lascazes, p. 681
Mary Euphrasia listened to them:

“One of the sisters who often accompanied her on her travels told me that the Servant of God passed many a night without going to bed in order to satisfy the desire that the sisters in the houses where she stayed had to talk to her and receive her advice.”

“The penitents came little by little, our Mother received them all with the goodness that characterized her, happy to give wings to her soul devoured by zeal for the salvation of poor lost sheep.”

“She, (the amiable Mother St. Euphrasia) opened her maternal arms to unfortunate souls”.

“She no longer thought of her own fatigue. With what tenderness and what largeness of spirit she saw to everything, thinking of everything, penetrating everything, thanks to that facility of judgement of which love for her daughters was the first movement!”

She cared for them physically and spiritually

“Nobody escaped her tender solicitude, neither her religious, or the children or penitents. She watched over all the spiritual and temporal needs, the nourishment, clothing, each one’s health, over little private needs. She had an attention and delicacy that was all her own: she welcomed each one with such a gracious manner that we were happy to have recourse to her. Everyone had access to her without distinction, without favouritism, and each one could believe that she was the most loved.”

“The Servant of God was ingenious in finding occasions to render service and please everyone. She was unique in the delicacy of her intentions. She sacrificed her health, rest and sleep, in favour of her neighbour at every occasion …”

“I saw how she loved her religious and the children of the different classes. This love was extraordinary and was manifested by services of all sorts: love of everyone without partiality for anyone, she was attached to reason and religion.”

“The constant recommendations the Servant of God made to her daughters that the Penitents and the children be well housed, well nourished, well dressed and well surrounded by all physical and spiritual care can be see in the book of her Conferences.”

“The Servant of God was of a charity full of delicacy for her daughters, I was a witness to it and an object of it. Those arriving at the Mother House were cared for with great tenderness; the attentive Mother General saw to it that they lacked nothing, either as regards food or clothing…Poverty did not prevent her from

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28 P.O. Witness, MSAFC, p. 462
29 P.O. Witness, MSAFC, p. 390
30 Letter from M. de Neuville to MEP, 12th August 1837, quoted by MSAFC, P.O. p. 442
31 Sr. Mary of St. John of the Cross, quoted by MSAFC, P.O. p. 466-467
32 P.O. Witness, Sr. Marie de Ste Thérèse Letocart, p. 193
33 P.O. Witness, MSAFC, p. 469
34 P.O. Witness, Louis Brémond, p. 989
35 P.O. Witness, MSAFC, p. 508
being **always generous towards all**: this explains the **great number** of persons who came to ask to see her in the **parlour** without giving either their name or the reason for their visit.  

**Mary Euphrasia forgave them:**

“Sometimes she met certain religious who were compromised or who had left the Congregation, but who, giving signs of repentance wanted to return; the Servant of God then often listened to her maternal heart, rather than to severe advice which tended to prevent her from being merciful.”

“It is publicly known among us that one had hardly acknowledged one’s faults against the rules and made the least satisfaction in reparation, before the Servant of God had **forgotten everything**. If, after having reprimanded a sister, she saw that she was mistaken, she sent for her and said to her with great humility: ‘My daughter, you were right, I was wrong’.”

**Mary Euphrasia showed them affection:**

“She **loved the penitents**, whose salvation was the principle occupation and like the goal of her entire life. Superior General, she went to **visit them** frequently in order to show them her affection and to encourage them; she even went as far as paying the debts of some of them in order to give them peace of mind.”

“I lived in the same house as the Servant of God for 33 years, from 1835 - 1868. When I was very small I often went to meet her, she would give me a little **cuddle in passing** and speak nicely to me. She came very often to see us when I was a Magdalen. She gave us beautiful and holy instructions and came herself to preside over our Chapters from time to time. I heard our sisters talk about it a lot for she was well loved; she was so good and so maternal! Among the Magdalens she is still spoken about a lot. We could never forget her.”

3. **Faced with exclusion from educational and formational opportunities:**

**Mary Euphrasia, with her daughters, used the latest technology.**

_P.S. Besides these great works, we are in the midst of immense work here: we are making a huge **washhouse** at St. Nicolas, it is said to be one of the most beautiful in France! The pumps plunge into the lake, then a covered carousel on the terrace pours 60 barrels of water an hour into a cave where the wash house is built! ...And my daughter, you would not recognize your upper **gardens** at St. Nicolas...We have planted 40 fruit trees._

**She provided an efficient and competitive formation**

“From 1836, **language courses** were given at the Mother House, before even any foundation abroad had been decided. Later, Mgr. de Hercé, the Bishop of

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36 P.O. Witness, Sr. Marie Thérèse Letocart, p. 260-261
37 P.O. Witness, Sr. Mary Euphrasia Laporte, 1165
38 P.O. Witness, MSAPC, p. 506
39 P.O. Witness, Sr. Mary of St. Peter Merckelbach, p. 683
40 P.O. Witness, Sr. M. Marie d’Egypte Body, p. 1468
41 Letter 1540 from Mary Euphrasia to Sr. Mary of St. John of the Cross David, 23rd November [1856]
Nantes, 100kms from Angers, came regularly to hear the confessions of the sisters of the different nationalities and give courses in English.⁴²

She had languages taught well:
“Oh, I know your fears for the Italian religious very well⁴³…We will find you one whatever the cost. But do not worry about St. Emile. For the rest, she speaks fluent Italian…Reply my dearest daughter.”⁴⁴

She gave the young delinquents the possibility of a training:
For the children marked by a difficult life, often rejected, Mary Euphrasia initiated a widely recognized type of education. She brought into the educational establishments a teaching adapted to the millions of young people for whom it was the only chance.
The Law of 11 August 1850 in France allowed young detainees under 16 years of age to leave the prison world, to finish their sentences in agricultural colonies…to be created. Mary Euphrasia seizing this possibility, received a positive response in 1852…Without Nazareth, these children would have remained in prison until the age of 20 among the adults.⁴⁵

Mary Euphrasia encouraged the Sisters to learn
From 1835 – 1855 nearly half the postulants entered without being able to read or write. In an unpublished text, St. Mary Euphrasia encourages the novices learning to read and write. “I know it is difficult for you to remain sitting doing school work and that you came to serve the good God and help us by working. All the same follow your classes and do it for love. You can thus give more service…And you, who have had the chance of a good education, do not be proud of your knowledge, it is nothing to do with you; and treat your sisters who have not had the same chances as you, with delicacy”.⁴⁶

She recognized the importance of space for relaxation:
In letter no: 1646 to Fr. LEBOUCHER, Mary Euphrasia talks to him about a fishing expedition she organized “this 28th July so as to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the foundation of Angers”.

Creativity to recruit the young girls and children in distress
She organized an extern sister in Paris to take charge of sending young girls, orphans and abandoned children to Angers.

OVER TO YOU:
In order to know more about this story, consult the supporting document.

⁴² Laugier Odile, La femme française au 19ème siècle, p.18
⁴³ The object of the mission in Cairo being teaching, the quality of the Sisters who taught, notably Italian, was important. The Sisters were afraid of competition from a school run by Italian Sisters.
⁴⁴ Letter 1604, from Mary Euphrasia to Sr. Mary Euphrasia de Laporte, Egypt.
⁴⁵ Laugier Odile, Justice and Mercy in the life and action of Mary Euphrasia and the first communities, Angers, Manuscript, p.4-5
⁴⁶ Laugier Odile, La femme française au 19ème siècle, p. 18
III. THE CONGREGATION’S RESPONSE TODAY
The Good Shepherd Congregation today continues Mary Euphrasia’s action in favour of women, young girls and children by its commitment to justice.

1. Principles
Our present commitment to the work for justice rests on the following principles:

- **Solidarity**
The documents of our latest General Chapters (1997-2003) invite us to develop a *solidarity* with the poor or oppressed, (especially the women), rather than to be people who render a social service, or who witness to holiness, which is implicit.

*Global solidarity* signifies experience, experiencing in a concrete way, a relationship with all those who suffer exclusion, be it through oppression, marginality or discrimination. It signifies acting as if it was me who was the excluded person.

As sisters, we have sat with the little girls or women who have participated in our programmes; we have been at their side; we have listed to them and we have spent long nights taking care of them, and praying in the chapel bearing the anxieties of “our girls”. When we sense that someone is agitated and suffering, we too have suffered from insomnia and anxiety. **Now we must do the same with the realities of today in our society:** experience the realities of other people, *in our own and also in other countries*. This is solidarity in Good Shepherd spirituality.

- **Political action/ To be inserted into social systems**
The documents of 1997 invite us to intervene, to plead and to commit ourselves to political and systemic work. They call us to use our formation, our status, our knowledge and our experiences in order to speak the truth to governments and to undo the unjust structures of our society, the political, economic, social and ecclesiastical structures.

Briefly, political action is not only walking in protest demonstrations, or writing letters on diverse political matters. It is also, taking decisions with regard to purchases: what consumer goods do we use?; how do we use water?; what investments do we have?; what land do we have? Political action is voting, forming people to the knowledge and defence of their human rights and of reinforcement strategies.

It is to connect our direct service to systemic structures, i.e. with government departments, schools’ admission policies; the chauvinistic structures of the family, international conventions on human rights. Systemic labour can be boring and
without external gratification. We get impatient with the bureaucrats and with interminable paperwork. But to be committed and inserted at this level is a clear call from the Congregation.

1. Inter communication by networking
The creation of networks and the commitment to collaboration assure that we do not leave our treasure buried. They are today’s means of allowing our light to shine, of not hiding our light under a bushel, of announcing the Good News. It requires the use of the Internet and association with other NGO's in our ministries.

It signifies formation, professionalism and competence in human rights and national and international conventions on human rights. It signifies speaking a second language, signifies an inter-religious dialogue, embracing feminism and undoing unjust social structures.

We must work to develop a better capacity for basic and effective communication, which is the basis of all interconnection in the cybernetic network. If we cannot communicate with the professionals and the politicians, with groups and networks, we cannot live out the call we have heard.

2. Methodologies
Our procedure since 1997 has led us to examine the methodologies used in the ministries, administration and in our relationships with the people we employ, the laity and all people. For this we had to conceive reinforcement strategies, assure the participation of all and constantly evaluate.

3. Formation
Formation is a great challenge which requires a lot of resources and one we cannot shirk if we expect to be the compassionate face of the Good Shepherd today.

IV. Achievements:
THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS AN NGO WITH SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC SOCIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

In November 1996, the Good Shepherd was affiliated to the United Nations as an NGO with consultative status with ECOSOC. The goal of this affiliation is to promote our mission of reconciliation, above all in its orientation in favour of girls and women. It is a way of collaboration that allows us to bring about change where others see themselves condemned to live on the margins. By supporting the objectives of the United Nations, we seek to spread mercy towards the poor
and the oppressed and to alert our world of today to a sense of the dignity of each person.” (Definition of NGO in 1999 in a report to the General Council).

Making full use of our NGO status signifies, among other things, to be inserted at local or national level in the NGO regional procedures for women and children; leading to a four yearly report from the Provinces on the statute for women in the perspective of the NGO which will go to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women).  

OVER TO YOU:
What do you understand by:
- NGO
- ECOSOC
- CEDAW?

How have you collaborated, contacted, worked with our NGO Office?

And your Community?
What have been the obstacles, the reticences?

Blanca Ines VELASQUEZ

Translated by: Anne Josephine CARR

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