

## THREE SS.CC. SISTERS ACCORDING TO THE HEART OF JESUS: GABRIEL, HERMASIE, ANNE-MARIE

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We are going to go for a walk with three women over a period of time, which spans almost two centuries, and in an area that essentially covers France and Peru... Together let us go to meet three of our sisters who in their walk in the steps of Christ, lived the Gospel in the ss.cc. way: Gabriel de la Barre, Hermasie Paget et Anne-Marie Caron. Let us take a look at the paths taken and where each meandering shows a personality trait or says something about her vocation...

Let us take a quick look and make a short presentation with the help of a triptyque which contains a profile of gifted lives.

### Anne-Marie CARON



- Born on the 26th August, 1920 in Corbeil, France. There were 6 children in the family, but one brother died while still young as he was preparing for the priesthood, and a religious sister.
- In 1936 she studied at the Catholic Teacher Training College in Versailles so as to work in education as she considered that as a way of serving God.
- She was a teacher at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war.
- Entrée dans la Congrégation le 9 août 1945. Fait profession temporaire le 6 août 1947.
- She made final profession on the 6th August, 1951.
- Principal places of mission : Picpus, Chartres, Rome, in teaching, formation and the service of authority.
- She died on the 8th February, 2007 in the Grand'Maison in Poitiers.

#### 1. Some general traits, common points...

- a. Women whose childhood and youth were not necessarily protected. Evident human limitations of a psychological, cultural, social nature....  
Trials of all sorts marked their journey, but the power of God is shown in weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10). Some of their weaknesses became strength because they accepted them in depths.

**Anne-Marie:** *Shortly before entering the Congregation, her father whom she loved, died and she had to support the family financially, in particular, the education of the younger children. The presence of her aged and very demanding mother, and her sick older sister, a few steps from her office, when she was Provincial, was not easy. What is more, not everyone understood and that made matters worse and caused more friction.*

In Chartres where she was at the same time headmistress of the school and the community superior, she experienced tensions. It was the beginning of co-education at Jeanne d'Arc school, a time of powerful objections at the level of education in the faith, but also the years of renewal of community life with its impetus towards freedom.

Rather slow, from this slowness which could infuriate, she suffered by being given a tough time, and yet, no one hesitated to always ask her more because they recognized that "what Sr. Anne-Marie did, was well done."

- b. The time and place where these three sisters lived... what they received as mission... influenced them and they were marked by them:

- The second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a period of great changes – of refoundation – in society and in religious life, the Church in Paris, Chartres and Rome, **Anne-Marie** made a deep impression on the Province of France.

Three classic journeys. Women of their time, they are “**prophets**” for today. Essentially under two aspects:

- Women in search of the Will of the Father for themselves and for the service entrusted to them, in search of a harmony with the Gospel. They searched for God with their heart and from their whole heart and so proclaimed it.
- Their search for truth took human form in a world that they loved and served

**Anne-Marie:** *Strength of discernment in life. Sr. Anne-Marie listened, hesitated, consulted, prayed and meditated for a long time in her heart before deciding, before taking the plunge.*

*She wrote to the sisters in the Drew community, which had just been opened in 1976: One point that requires your immediate attention is that of the person responsible. Do you hope that she will be named for 3 years according to the statutes for superiors of houses? Or would you prefer to have it on a temporary basis with a different statute for the responsible? Have you any suggestions? Do you feel ready for a consultation?”*

- Women of compassion: for them, “later” worries, the disadvantaged, became a continual praise of God.

**Anne Marie:** *In July 1976, Anne-Marie was named provincial superior. In her letter presenting the texts of the recent provincial chapter she wrote: “We were aware that the Spirit worked with us during the chapter in spite of our poverty and without a doubt, because of our poverty.”*

*In the very name of her faith, Anne-Marie had two passions: the poor and youth. Great and wise was her sensitivity and her generosity in the distribution of gifts to charitable organizations. Her former pupils speak of her as a woman whose way of reasoning with those to whom she spoke, drew much respect for her.*

- c. The service of authority is however, a gift which she exercised with meticulousness... convinced that this service was not just a task to be carried out. Their service was affectionate and they listened attentively to everyone. “You must allow them to eat” said Fr. Mateo in speaking of superiors. Gabriel, Hermasie and Anne-Marie were literally eaten: everything to everyone, they allowed themselves to be consumed in every way.

**Anne-Marie :** *“She never considered herself a leader, and I would agree with her... but her unconditional search for God, made her an excellent leader, full of prudence, of respect for others and great discretion. She was anxious to promote unity and communion at a time when spirits tried to call on Paul, Apollo or others”... testimony of Maria Paloma Aguirre.*

*She was unpretentious and considered herself more as “a good second person” she liked to collaborate. As with Cardinal Newman, she could and liked to say, “the shoes of the saints are sufficient for me...”*

*“Sr. Anne-Marie worked from her head, she did not allow herself to be carried away by her first reactions and after due consideration and reflection, she allowed her heart to speak. She did not need to shout nor to be very angry with her pupils because their comments were listened to and respected.” Testimony of a former pupil. If her intelligence was great, her goodness surpassed it.*

## 2. They walked humbly with their God in the Congregation.

- a. Their filial “trust” in the call and in the mercy of God. They learned how to live with God from their childhood. On this favourable fertilizing ground, they dared to advance into deep water and to nourish their interior life. Rather than conformity to an example of virtue, one perceives in our three sisters, a personal response to an interior call.

**Anne-Marie** *She loved to talk of her childhood, of her youth, of her family, the place where she received a solid Christian formation marked with freedom. “In the family, God existed, he was part of our life; I did not think of him when I was worried or when it was time for Mass, but I thought about him at each moment, as the eternal one to whom I owed everything and who accompanied me.” Told by a member of the family.*

*“Pious, but without being soppy and without an inclination to “sermonize” that sometimes was the attitude of the elderly towards the young...” Testimony of a religious sister...*

*“Her faith was alive and simple. During her studies at the Catholic Institute in Paris, she studied with enthusiasm, but without getting lost in the details.” Collected from one of her community companions during the time of study.*

- b. God was the “favourite” for each one of them. However, the personal relationship of each one with the God of Jesus Christ is discrete, Enthusiastic for the will of God, they were always on the road, each one carried within a potential to communicate They allowed their hearts to beat to the rhythm of the Heart of God to be able to think like Him. God is their first love, which they applied to the human person.

**Anne-Marie:** *Secretive, reserved, she perspired God. Her face, her deep look and her smile said more than words. The numerous testimonies received in the Poitiers community the day after her return to the Father all go in this sense.*

*Her sentiments and her moods could be read on her face in the depths and clarity of her look.*

- c. Their original way of loving and following Christ: to enter and live the ss.cc. religious life. Convinced that the will of God always meant an expression of love and an increase in life, by their governance and above all by their life itself, indicates for us how linked they were to a responsible and adult obedience like that of Jesus.

**Anne-Marie:** *“ She measured everything by the yardstick of the Gospel”, a sister wrote the day after her death. Her taste for meditating on the Scriptures was strong, in particular through the liturgy of the day. Anne-Marie found inspiration and strength in the Word of God to which she laid herself open. It was as if she put into practice this recommendation of St. Gregory the Great: “I beg you to meditate each day on the words of your Creator. Learn to know the Heart of God in the very words of God” (Letter V, 46 to Théodore)*

*Her search for God was unconditional. An anecdote which is told in the Caron family and which speaks of the “deceased” when she was attracted to the following of the Lord. “When Anne-Marie was 25 years old, she announced that she was going to become a religious, her maternal aunt said to her: “How? A lovely girl like you?” Anne-Marie replied: “and so? Are only the ugly ones reserved for the Lord?”*

*While trained and enthusiastic for teaching, that was not her reason for entering the Congregation. She took the step in the name of her faith in Jesus Christ and her desire to be consecrated to his Heart. She spent her life resting*

*hidden in Him...*

*She was particularly docile to the voice of the Spirit and knew how to help others to be the same, according to several testimonies. This is how she made courageous decisions that some of the sisters never thought possible, above all coming from her: for example, daring to give the headship of the School in Rennes to a lay person (February, 1978), putting into place a system of subsidization among the communities of the Province to create a more evangelical mentality and to live in the spirit of the Beatitudes.*

*In the Province of France, it was from Sr. Anne-Marie that we learned how to do the personal and community project*

- d. Contemplative women, they learned from the Master who is gentle and humble of heart. Their love for the Eucharist, their sense of prayer and in particular of adoration lead them to the revelation of a humble, gentle and fragile God, friend of the poor.

**Anne-Marie:** *“As a young sister, I was deeply impressed to find Sr. Anne-Marie in the chapel, late at night after a day of exhausting work of the day where she had to face a lot of things regarding the school, the community and diverse things of the Congregation which were confided to her:” According to the testimony of a sister.*

*Anne-Marie believed strongly in unity. It was from the Eucharist that she drew this faith and this unwavering hope that unity is possible, the Reign of God is already present. Cf. Constitutions No. 6, an article that she especially cherished. “To make present the Kingdom of God, we open up to the transformation of the human heart and we try to be artisans of communion in the world.”*

- e. Their deep attachment, their great love – impassioned love – for the Congregation and for the Church for which they wanted to be “useful”. Existing for others, with others, as a family, was their joy.

**Anne-Marie:** *Already at her initial formation stage, she devoted herself to the task of learning about the Founders and to reading Congregational writing from the very beginning. Later it was with great zeal and a great concern for the truth, that she worked in the archives in Rome and in Paris, and visiting the Congregational places, in particular Picpus, communicating easily her zeal, giving her listeners a desire to deepen that which touched the patrimony of the Congregation.*

### **3. The place of others in their lives.**

- a. Through their apostolate of goodness and friendship, they knew how to welcome others just as they were. Their ability to love and create friendship, confidence in the other was great and often spontaneous. Deep and lasting friendships with the joys and demands that entails are a characteristic of each one of them. They went along the road of life making friends.

**Anne-Marie:** *Faithful to her friends, she had a lovely memory of the heart.*

*A sister from Hawaii says that she came to Paris to learn French and had asked Anne-Marie to go with her to know the way to the language school. She thought she would go back alone. On coming out from the course, she was very surprised to find Anne-Marie at the door of the classroom. She was waiting for her and she did this every day until she knew the way... If your friend asks you to walk a mile...*

*Her lasting friendship with Sr. Claire Tropé ss.cc. took shape on the benches of the Teacher Training College in*

Versailles in September, 1936. It was there that they grew to appreciate each other, to have the same dream: to give God first place in their lives and to serve him through teaching. Such was their friendship that they helped each other to grow and supported each other in difficult moments.

- b. Sisters with a “universal” and tolerant heart. In their charity towards their neighbour, they thought of others and wanted their happiness, thinking little of themselves and were strong in regard to community life.

**Anne-Marie:** *She was a competent teacher. A former pupil from Chartre remembers... “When I went into second class I was 13 and a half. I became a boarder at the same time: I had to repeat a year. For me it was the first failure and I felt I was going to disappoint my mother. Sr. Anne-Marie talked to me as an adult saying that failing was part of life. Childishly I thought: “It is bad! I have worked badly...” I received the response that sometime one needs to fail to reach excellence, that repeating will allow me to mature and show my worth, because if I had passed, I would have remained mediocre.”*

*The French sisters and others are unanimous in recognizing Sr. Anne-Marie’s liking and capacity for community life.*

- c. Without fear they lived and witnessed at the heart of the social life of their time. Their missionary daring led to realistic and new commitments.

**Anne-Marie:** *Her faith was alive and she was very strong in her devotion to the present moment, she did not cry over the past and trusted in the future.*

*She believed strongly in the foundation of small inserted communities and she moved in this sense, persevering and accompanying each one of the new foundations with a lot of good judgment.*

*It was during her time as Provincial that Provincial Assemblies were put in place during which she encouraged the participation of all the sisters.*

### **Conclusion:**

We have made a quick pilgrimage through the centuries. We have remembered ordinary places and situations... The memory of three women, who, before us have walked humbly in the steps of Jesus Christ.

On the way we have tried to talk of the action of God and his marvels in Gabriel, Hermasie and Anne-Marie. I hope this joint walk in the steps of God has made us enter more into the ss.cc. promised land (cf. Ex. 23:14), - this land where milk and honey flows – because with burning hearts we heard our sisters and shared how good it is to live and serve as a child of the Sacred Hearts.

### **Bibliography available to us:**

#### **Anne-Marie Caron:**

*It is still a little early to talk about a real bibliography. There is very little of her “official” correspondence as provincial superior of France addressed to the sisters and we have not looked in the archives to find her “private” correspondence of which there is an abundance.*

*What we have gathered from here and there and living witnesses, all the sisters in France and many others in the world who knew Sr. Anne-Marie.*

*Contribution from members of her family.*