

Historical Sketch of the Vision and Leadership Styles of Marie Thérèse de Lamourous and Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, and Their Inspiration Today for the Marianist Family

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Introduction:

In this paper I will look at the life and work of the two female Founders of the Marianist Family, Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, and the qualities they developed and perfected as leaders during the chaos and upheaval of the French Revolution, building a very successful social services agency, a religious order, and lay communities. Finally, this will all be examined in light of the Marianist Family today and the continued guidance and experience we can gain from our female Founders.

Identifying the qualities of leadership found in a person whose work we are familiar with has become a common practice in our society today. Leadership has become a topic of study and a goal to strive for in almost every enterprise. Specifically servant leadership, which Robert Greenleaf describes below as

The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions... The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?¹

In her groundbreaking work, *The Second Sex*, about the lives and realities of women throughout history, Simone de Beauvoir presents the life of women during the French Revolution. Writing mostly on the married women and the amount of power lost when Napoléon gained power, de Beauvoir also makes an interesting point about the celibate women. "Girl and wife were deprived of the attribute of citizenship, which prevented them from practicing law and acting as guardian. But the celibate woman, the spinster, enjoyed full civil powers, while marriage preserved the old dependency."² Although de Beauvoir does not specifically address religious women, we certainly can see her point of the difference of power between the married women and the celibate

women. It is the example of Marie Thérèse and Adèle and the respect they commanded from the androcentric world in which they lived where we see this statement come alive. Because of their vocation, they were both allowed to exist in the world differently than their married peers.

It should be noted that although not specifically a topic of this paper, Father Chaminade's mission and inspiration of re-christianizing France through building communities of faithful people, both lay and religious, is the bedrock of this examination of the personalities of Marie Thérèse and Adèle. It was his relationship with these women and their bold collaboration that allowed for the work of building the Kingdom to be done and our rich history to be made.

Marie Thérèse de Lamourous

Born in Barsac in the southern countryside of France, Marie Thérèse was brought up in a family of middle-class nobles. The eldest of 11 children, she often was charged with the care of the younger ones. Because of financial hardships the family was forced to move to Bordeaux when she was 12 years old. Here she was exposed to all aspects of life in a city that would eventually become the background of her life's work. Because of the fiscal realities of the family, Marie Thérèse was exposed to all aspects of life in a developing city—from construction and progress to the poverty and displacement that can be left behind from that very progress. It is most surely the case that she was aware of women who were forced into prostitution because of poverty, at a very early age. It is also known that her mother would explain people like the women she would dedicate her life to as “unedifying and contrary to the Christian principles she had embraced.”³

In April of 1794 the National Convention declares that all former nobles are forbidden to live in Paris, a fortified city, a seaport, or a coastal town, forcing the de Lamourous family back to the countryside of Pian. It is during this time that Marie Thérèse develops as a pastoral minister, working with underground parishes. Able to maintain a relationship with the juring priest, Andrieu of her parish in Pian, but have the fortitude to exercise ministries outside of his control such as catechism lessons to women and children, visiting the sick, holding weekly prayer services, and arranging for nonjuring priests to say Mass as often as the situation was safe enough for them. To the people of Pian, Marie Thérèse had become the pastor of the local church, loved and respected by all, perfectly balancing the dangerous absurdity of the Revolutionary government with the needs of the Church in crisis.

After the immediate turmoil of the Revolution had ceased, Marie Thérèse, by this time a good friend and collaborator with William Joseph Chaminade, will begin her life's work creating a home for the most vulnerable women of the society, the Miséricorde. It was here that her qualities as a leader can be outlined and discussed as a source of inspiration for those wrestling with the idea of Marianist leadership and the practical implications for even the most seasoned Marianist.

To look at the leadership characteristics of Marie Therese is to recognize the places and the communities she was working in throughout her life, developing skills that would culminate during her years spent at the Misericorde, directing both a religious order and countless women seeking safety, shelter, and a more faithful life. During the Revolution, when she was living and ministering to the countryside she began to transform from a young woman, very focused on her family and her own personal sanctification, to a maturing and courageous leader of the faithful. Her leadership style can be broken down into at least three different categories, each interdependent on each other: church leadership, business leadership and direction, and emotional leadership and inspiration.

After meeting Father Chaminade and learning of his inspiration at Saragossa and his plans to rebuild the Church in France in the guidance of Mary, through communities of lay people, Marie Thérèse began to adopt this mission as her own. Assisting Father Chaminade in his organization of the sodality, she soon began heading the Young Women's Section, being nicknamed *Mère* by the sodalists because of her love and dedication. The Misericorde and the Sodality became her primary effort of living and building this culture of permanent mission. "Happily, relations between the Misericorde and the Sodality were very close, and so were their respective physical bases after 1804. What Marie Thérèse did for one was often of help to the other. The Ladies of the Retreat had their origin in a group of benefactresses of the Misericorde, and for some time they met there monthly."⁴

Marie Thérèse's commitment to bringing forth God's promised justice is evident throughout her life. Her unity within the Church throughout the revolution was evident through her relationships with both juring and nonjuring priests. Her faith that God was present despite all the hurt and confusion expressed by both sides through the turmoil was unwavering. It is this faith that her vocation grows out of, seeing the results of a war-torn society she responds to these feelings with action, not without hesitation or question, much like Mary, but ultimately with a full-hearted YES, agreeing to work and live in the house of Mercy with the "women of ill repute." The role conversion played in her life is another point of inspiration from Marie Thérèse which the Marianist Family can take away from her life. Not only her belief in the power of conversion for her *daughters* but in her own life, the conversion that took place in her heart when first asked to take on the work of the Misericorde, the conversion which allows us to know the otherness of the other. It is this aspect of Marie Thérèse's leadership where we see her as a servant-leader: her efforts and genuine care for her daughters for their humanity, their growth and healing, is exactly what we should strive for as leaders in the Marianist Family.

Great qualities of Marie Thérèse that often can be overlooked or have historically been cast in different lights, which contributed to her leadership skill and style, were her faith in God and her active pursuit of the vocation God had called her to live. Her selflessness and constant ability to give all that she is to her ministry, her ability to read and understand the needs of others, her loyalty to her family—both at the Misericorde and Pian. And finally, her patience for not only the will of God to reveal itself, but also

for the wisdom it takes when one embarks on the journey of walking with people in recovery.

Marie Thérèse is a model for social service administrators and business persons alike. As a director she understands empowerment and rehabilitation as the foundation for bringing the entire person back into society as a fully-welcomed community member. Her policy of come free, stay free is revolutionary for the time (as it is today). The program she developed was based on the strengths and the goodness that exist in every person, especially the *daughters* who came to her door, who for so long had been told they were not good, that God was not part of them. She preached and practiced bringing forth the Incarnate God. “But for those who chose to stay, there would be a program of formation to repentance and to virtue; there would be professional training to enable them to earn their living; all would be involved in maintaining the house and working to help support it; and each *daughter* must be prepared for eventual reentry into decent society.”⁵ This philosophy was supported by her organization of the Miséricorde, and an elaborate system of assistance and daily reports kept Marie Thérèse fully aware of the progress of each daughter. Constantly aware of finances, she would be looking for work for her daughters, searching for a living, fair wage for them, but would do everything in her power to not take work from those who needed it in the community surrounding the Miséricorde. Having great success at points with adventures in cigar-making, at one point, the Miséricorde was supplying the city of Bordeaux with nearly 15,000 cigars a day!⁶

The attitude, in which Marie Thérèse approached her *daughters*, can only be described as true and genuine care and affection for the other. Her philosophy of the house being “one community,” where the directress lived life in common with the *daughters*, was most likely heavily influenced by Chaminade, which can be seen as an early insight into the lived experience of mixed composition in community. It was an experiment with community following a strict rule of life, women from different classes, working for the reconciliation of one another with God. The rule of life demanded a strict monastic-like schedule of the *daughters*: equal time dedicated to prayer, work, and study. Or, concerning breakfast, she had the *daughters* ask, “How can breakfast be for us a remedy against our past?” Her response was, “It can be a remedy for a sinful habit of giving in easily to glutton or sensuality.”⁷ This life would remain relatively unchanged for a number of years. This balance of life combined with her other philosophies of care, especially that each daughter would receive a new name when she entered the Miséricorde symbolizing her choosing a new path in life, rejecting her old ways, and also serving as a way to avoid the embarrassment that a family could often feel when a member entered an entity like the Miséricorde.

Finally, the great aspect of Marie Thérèse’s personality that made her a model of servant-leadership was her willingness to love the world with her entire heart. As lofty and unfeasible as this sounds it is exactly what one can conclude about this woman. She did this specifically through her patience, her loyalty, her constant source of selfless giving of her time and energy, living the name she had been so rightfully given, *Bon Mère*.

Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon

Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon was born on June 10, 1789, in Feugarolles to a wealthy, aristocratic land-owning family, the Baron and Baroness de Trenquelléon. One key to understanding the life of this incredible young leader and woman is to recognize that the year of her birth was also the year that started the French Revolution, making war and violence everyday realities in her life. Her Father is forced into exile when she is just barely three years old, being raised by essentially a young single mother. It is at this time when her personality begins to develop that her mother teaches her prayers and takes her along to visit the workers and friends who keep the chateau in working order during the chaos of the revolution, teaching her that works of mercy and kindness are how we know and understand God more fully.

After a pleasant, but still war-torn childhood the family is forced to leave their home, friends and family, church and neighbors, and travel through dangerous and unknown territory to escape a frightful government. Adèle will travel to Spain with her mother and brother, and eventually the family will settle in Spain and finally Portugal where the Baron would join them from England. Throughout the exile, Adèle's faith will continue to grow and form in a country where she is free to practice her faith. Before the time she makes her confirmation, Adèle will be living her life according to a strict rule of life . . . focused on preparing her for what she thinks will be her Carmelite vocation. She will make her confirmation on Feb 6, 1803. She will make it with other girls her age, two of whom become her best friends and collaborators in both the Association and the founding of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate: Agathe Diché and Jeanne Diché. With the guidance of her tutor and spiritual director, Jean Ducourneau, Adèle and Jeanne Diché begin to exchange letters, in August of 1804, of their spiritual progress and encouragement for each other, building a lasting friendship rooted in prayer and devotion to God. "This 'association' will soon extend itself to other young girls; it will expand beyond any of their expectations; it will develop into Adèle's great preoccupation over the next dozen years; it will eventually give rise to two new religious institutes in the Church and to numerous lay groups; it will continue far beyond Adèle's own death."⁸ It is during this time when Adèle develops as a prolific letter writer, constantly in contact with her associates, constantly in prayer with their needs on her mind. It was one of the goals of the Association to help one another prepare for a proper and good death, where one was right with God. However morbid-sounding this idea may seem, remembering the death experienced through the daily lives of these women is important, both from disease and war. This aspect of the Association was also more to make sure each friend was living a life dedicated to and worthy of life with God.

In a meeting that can only be described as Divine Providence, Adèle's mother finds herself in a hospital waiting room with a young priest from Bordeaux, Jean-Baptiste-Hyacinthe Lafon. The Baroness begins telling Lafon about her daughter's Association, and Lafon replies enthusiastically describing the Bordeaux Sodality he is part of. The Bordeaux Sodality was a community of Christians coming together for

prayer and good works, under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God, and the practical guidance of Father William Joseph Chaminade. The two exchanged information, promising to have Adèle contact Chaminade and vice versa. The relationship that would grow from this brief exchange, we believe changed the world. Chaminade and Adèle would become close collaborators supporting each other in their life's work of building communities of both lay and religious in post-revolutionary France.

In late 1816, as an outgrowth of the Association, Adèle in conjunction with Chaminade and other associates moves to Agen to open the first convent of the Daughters of Mary. "Their task will be: to teach the faith, to form to virtue young women of all conditions and states of life, to make of them true sodalists, to hold Sodality meetings, to conduct retreats for young girls, to help them discern their state in life. 'Your community,' he writes, 'will be completely composed of religious missionaries.'"⁹ For the next 12 years Adèle would work tirelessly at the formation of her sisters, compensating for how small her heart was by making sure God was loved by so many,¹⁰ until her early death in 1828 after a chronic battle with a lifelong illness.

To understand Adèle's leadership and vision of both the Association and the Daughters of Mary Immaculate it is necessary to know that Adèle struggled with the balance of action and contemplation her entire life. As a child she was well known for her vivacity. This spirit and joy that she went through life with did not dissipate as she aged, constantly struggling with her desire to work with the poor through education and other acts of mercy, with that of a life of contemplation, knowing and living a life dedicated to God and a prayerful existence in a rich monastic tradition, like the Carmelites. Eventually she would find balances to this internal struggle, establishing the Third Order Secular¹¹ and embracing the cloister rule that Chaminade thought so necessary of religious life. It is from this perspective that Adèle's leadership can be examined through distinct factors: community organizer, spiritual guide and director, administrator, and advocate for the poor and marginalized.

Adèle's work as a community organizer started young, with the development of the Association. It would continue throughout her life as she continued to invite people to walk with her. Her constant outreach to young women throughout her letter writing built a network across southwest France that was a vibrant and young lay community of people living in permanent mission. From this community of lay people Adèle started conversations and began the foundation work for the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. She did receive support, especially ecclesiastical support from Chaminade, but it is common NACMS folklore that she would have been the Foundress of a religious order in her own right,¹² without Chaminade's help. She was a charismatic, joyful, and faithful inspiration to all she came in contact with, inviting and creating space for all who wanted to join her. Her ability to communicate with so many people made her a leader in a world of confusion, her simple reminder of God's presence in people's lives created order.

Adèle's work as a spiritual guide and director is also an important key to understanding her as a leader. Her deep faith in God and her vocation for religious life

was evident even as a child. From a very young age, her work with the Association required her to provide spiritual direction to her peers. As the FMI developed and grew, her role as Superior General became important to the heart and soul of the adventure. “It was true she was vivacious, energetic, and perhaps a little hyperactive; but she was also a woman of deep faith, kindness, charitable concern, and unmistakable leadership qualities—yet obedient, humble and sensitive to the opinions and positions of others.”¹³ During the foundation of the FMI, as Marie Thérèse was assisting to help set up the convent and decide who the Superior General would be, at first she was not convinced Adèle should be the Superior, too quick, energetic, she would simply spoil everything; only after time spent in deep prayer with the new community did Marie Thérèse see what God had planned all along, that Adèle was exactly the person to lead this new community. Adèle’s use of her privilege and her ability to bring other women of privilege into a life with God is also another facet of her leadership as a spiritual guide.

We see Adèle, as an administrator, grow as a leader. From her first organization of the Association, to the management of the entire property of the chateau at Trenquelléon, where when her parents were away she managed the lives of all the workers and family living there at the time. Managing all aspects of the country estate from the winery to the gardens, animals, and the crops, it is here she would learn how to practically manage a large complex community working toward a common mission, all skills she would continue to develop as the Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

Finally, it is Adèle’s commitment to improving the lives of her neighbors who were poor, undereducated, and spirituality undeveloped that characterizes her leadership and vision of God’s promised justice. At one point in her young life, so that she might have more resources and money to use for the care of the poor, Adèle raised hogs for market!¹⁴ This she would carry with her through her entire life, requiring that the work of the Marianist Sisters always be conducted with the improvement of life for the poor in mind. This priority of working with the poor was also reflected in Adèle’s constant struggle with the vow of cloister and the desire to work directly with the poor.

Vision and inspiration

The lives and the work of Adèle and Marie Thérèse are inspirational. Their courage, confidence, and determination require us to see our work as the Marianist Family, in a new (and old) light. We are challenged by these women to create a network of communities and ministries that are true to the mission of our founders: the building of vibrant lay communities working for peace and justice. We, as a Marianist Family, can imagine these communities and ministries from different angles: spiritual, economic, communal, and political. These communities will continue to grow in the vibrant tradition of the Marianist charism, using as their guide for growth the System of Virtues, mental prayer and continued communal formation. The communities will become interconnected, with missions that support all aspects of Marianist life, lay and religious.

Communities will respond to the signs of the times and the needs of the world through projects that bring us out of the comfortable living rooms of the past and require us to work for life in all corners of the world. Projects will be responses to creative reflection of a community's need and could include ideas like urban farming, rehabilitation of homes in inner city neighborhoods, public art studios, alternative schooling projects, and access to space and time that promotes peace and spirituality. As these projects develop we will do well to know the styles of leadership from our Founders, we will grow in our faith as a Family when we embrace the otherness of the other like Marie Thérèse did, or constantly encourage each other to listen to the will of God, creating space in our lives for that reflection. We will be challenged not to be limited in our works by our present reality; we must not be crippled by economic climates or church scandals. Our work is now; today is when we build the Kingdom.

¹ Robert Greenleaf, *The Servant Leader*, 1970. <http://www.greenleaf.org/whatiss/>

² De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, 111.

³ Stefanelli, SM, Joseph, *Mlle de Lamourous*, 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸ Stefanelli, SM, Joseph, *Adele*, 71.

⁹ He is Chaminade. Stefanelli, SM, Joseph, *Adele*, 172.

¹⁰ "O my God, my heart is too small to love you, but I will see to it that you are loved by so many hearts, that their love will compensate for the weakness of mine." – Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, *Letters*, May 4, 1818.

¹¹ "Another portion of the Institute is also developing, the Third Order Secular. It is composed of lay women, sodalists, many of them from Adèle's Associates, who, in addition to the normal Christian life and apostolate, also undertake special "missions" of outreach to persons or areas that the cloistered community cannot reach. They share directly in some of the community prayer life, and in its retreats. They follow a Rule similar to that of the Bordeaux 'religious living in the world.' They take vows of obedience and devotedness to the Institute, and, if not married, add a vow of chastity." Joseph Stefanelli, SM, *Adele*, 221.

¹² Stefanelli, SM, Joseph NACMS folklore.

¹³ Stefanelli, SM, Joseph, *Mlle de Lamourous*, 256.

¹⁴ Stefanelli, SM, Joseph, *Adele*, 126.