



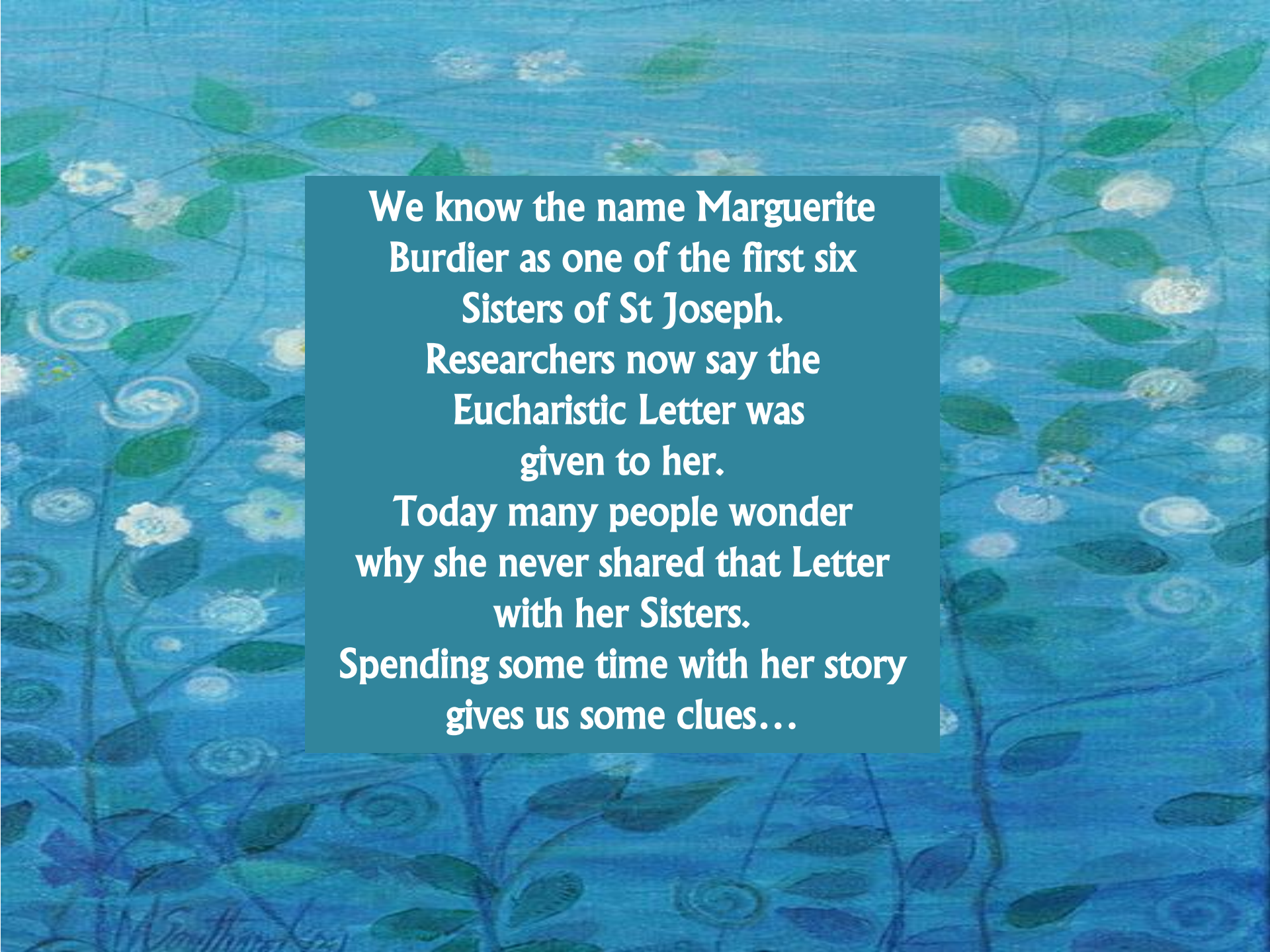
**A Message from  
Marguerite Burdier**

**2019**




**When we speak of the  
Eucharistic Letter we  
immediately think of the  
woman, Marguerite Burdier.**

**What do we know of  
Marguerite Burdier?**



**We know the name Marguerite  
Burdier as one of the first six  
Sisters of St Joseph.  
Researchers now say the  
Eucharistic Letter was  
given to her.**

**Today many people wonder  
why she never shared that Letter  
with her Sisters.  
Spending some time with her story  
gives us some clues...**



Let us listen to  
Marguerite's story  
to try to understand  
her situation...



**Let me introduce myself:  
My name is Marguerite Burdier...**

*Marguerite Burdier*

I was born in 1626 in Saint Julien in Forestz,  
in the diocese of Vienne, France.

The parish registry notes that I was the daughter of  
Guy Burdier and Gabrielle de Plaudier  
and that I was baptized on 23 October 1626.

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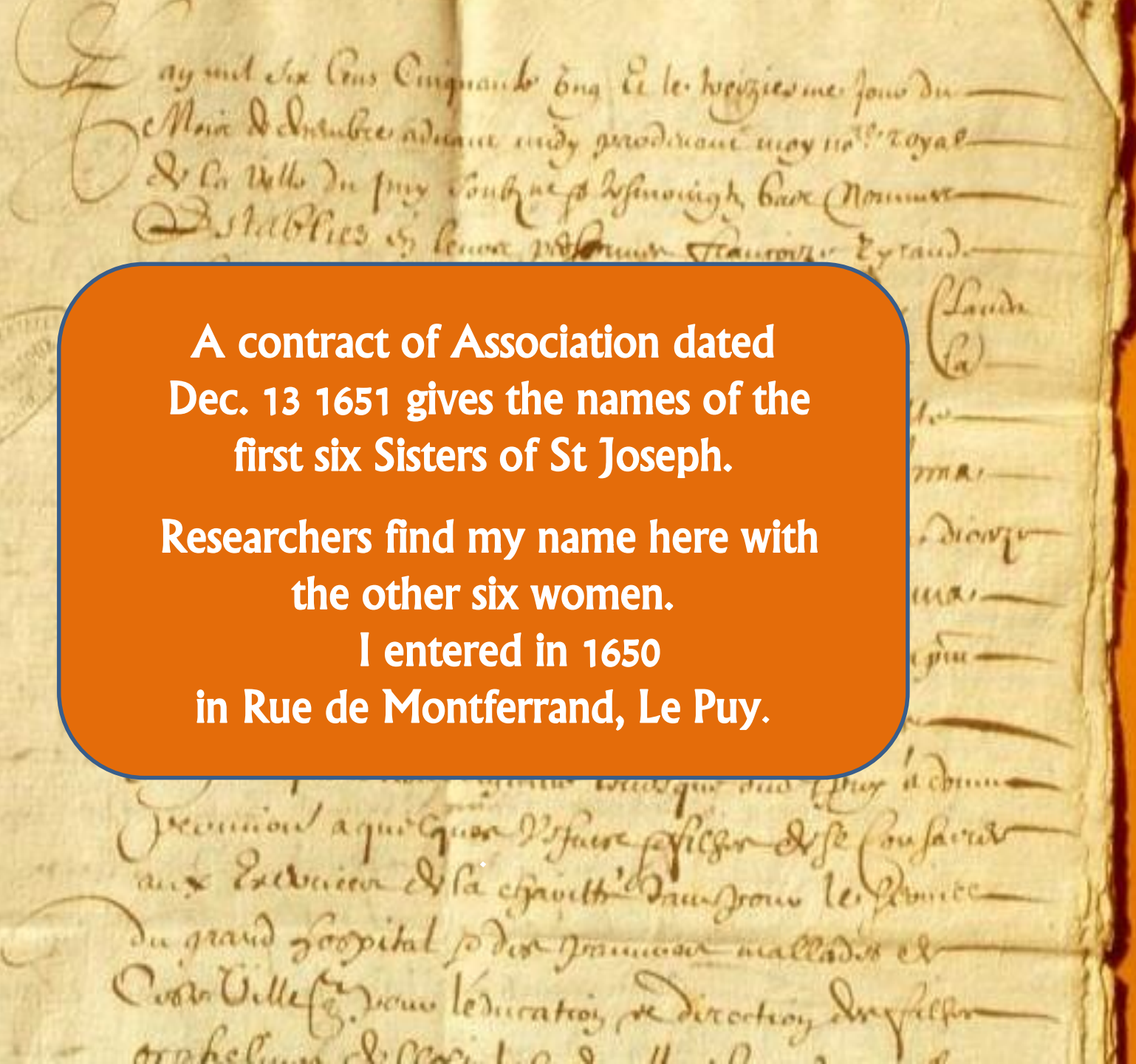
**In this same birth register,  
three brothers of mine  
are listed,  
and on the entry for the last  
brother, my father  
is listed as “Monsieur”,  
which indicates that  
my family had  
above average social status.  
Other records indicate that  
‘the Burdiers’  
belonged to  
a higher social class.**



A contract of Association dated  
Dec. 13 1651 gives the names of the  
first six Sisters of St Joseph.

Researchers find my name here with  
the other six women.

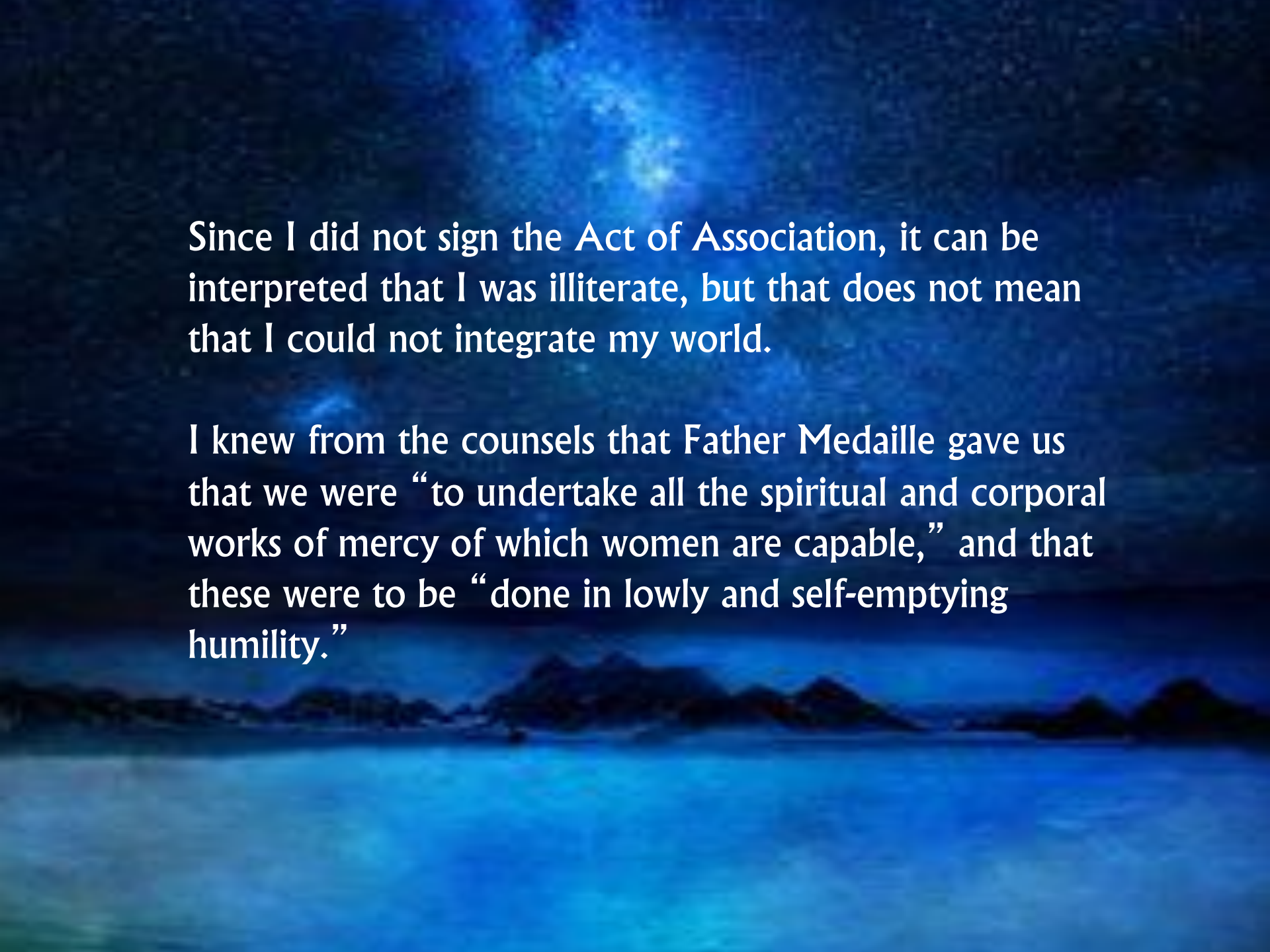
I entered in 1650  
in Rue de Montferrand, Le Puy.





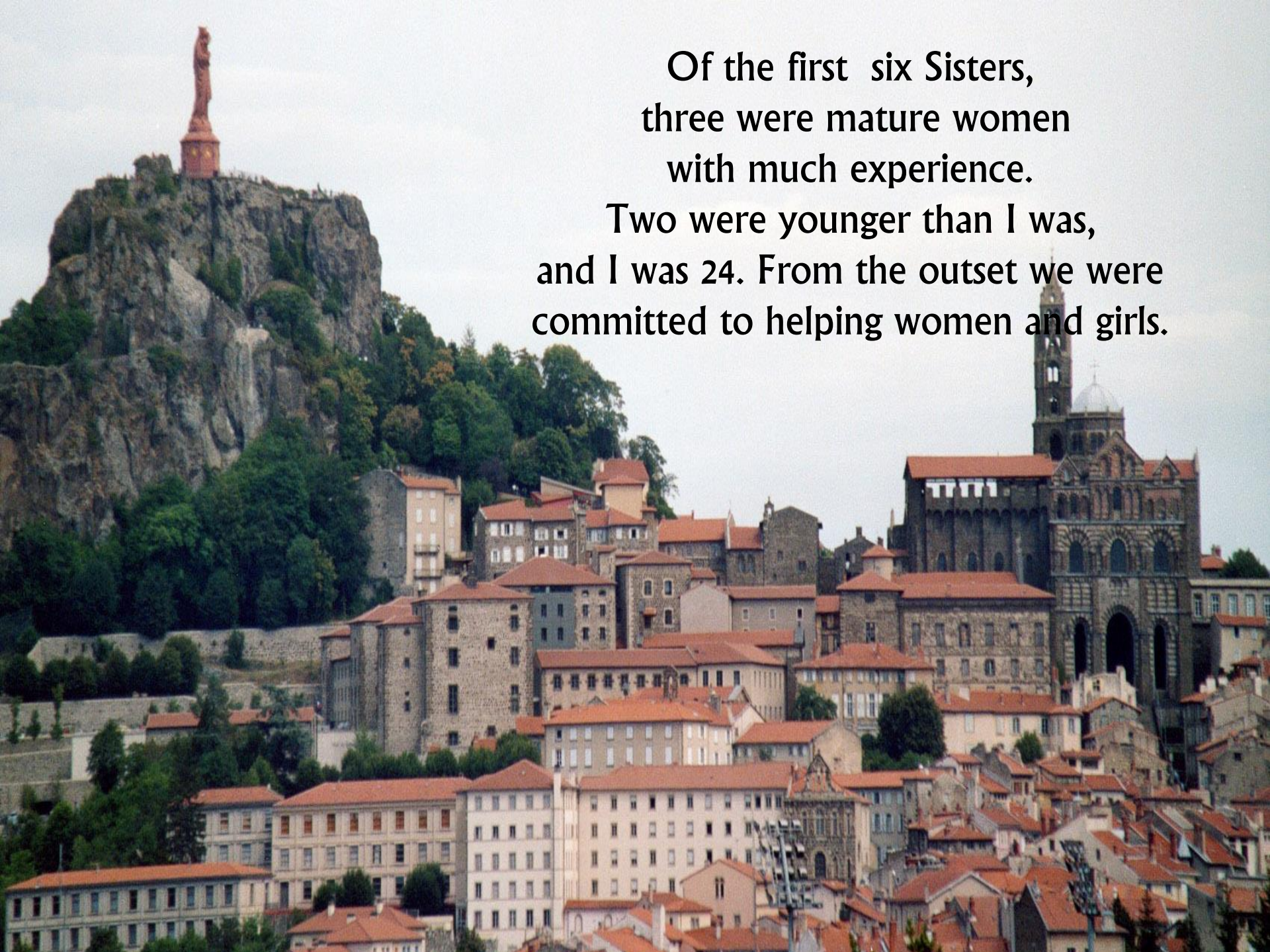
**Before I entered, I knew Fr. Medaille well, and I was steeped in his teaching. I desired to follow the advice and the maxims that he gave to us for life. Before 1650 I was a lace maker, and had a deep desire to help the poor especially the women and girls. It has been said of me that I had a strong personality and a good administrative sense. I had above all a deep sense of serving others.**



A serene night landscape with a starry sky and a calm body of water. The sky is dark blue with a bright, glowing star or planet in the upper center. The water is a deep blue, reflecting the light from the sky. In the distance, there are dark, silhouetted mountains or hills. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

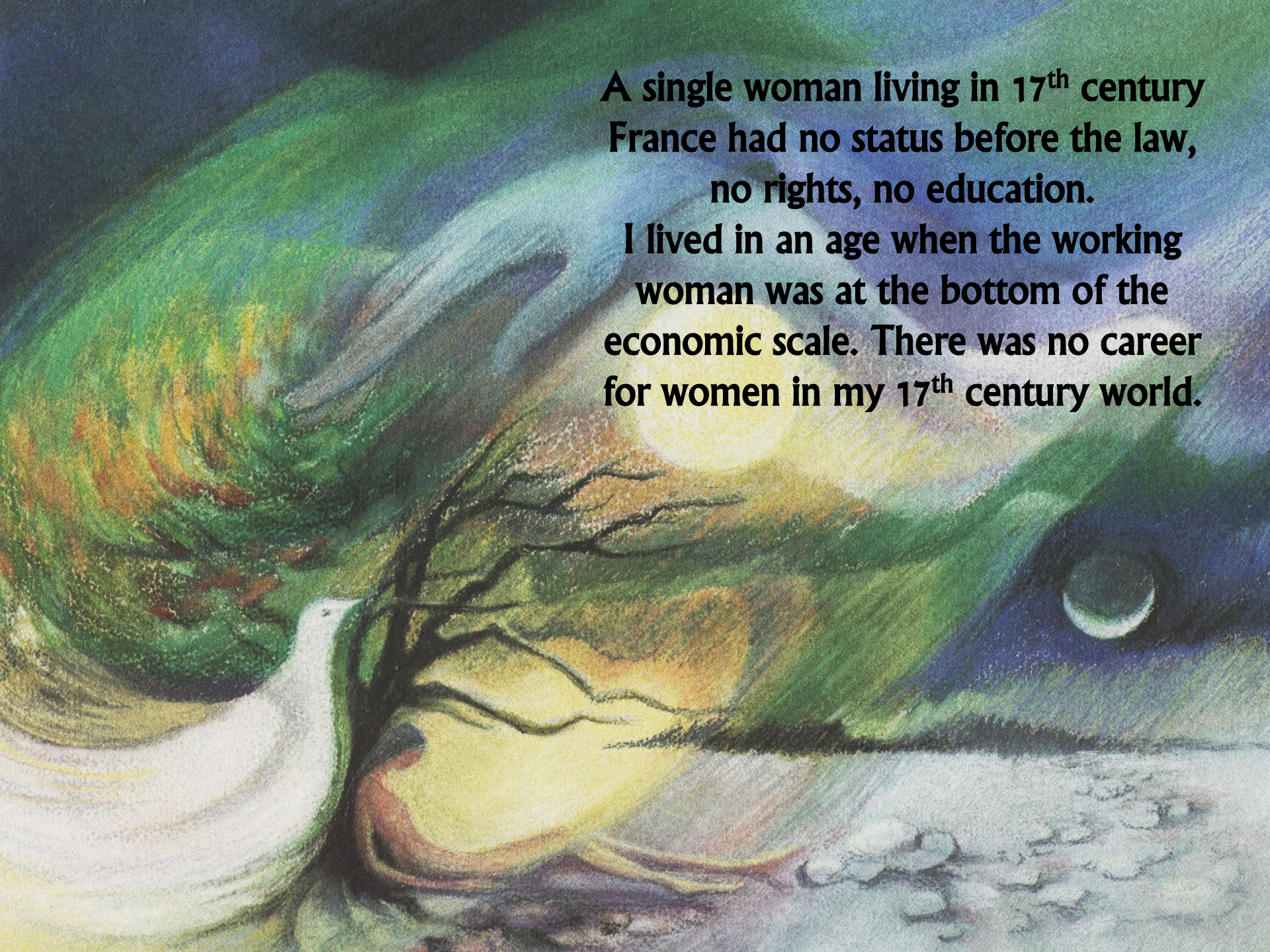
Since I did not sign the Act of Association, it can be interpreted that I was illiterate, but that does not mean that I could not integrate my world.

I knew from the counsels that Father Medaille gave us that we were “to undertake all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy of which women are capable,” and that these were to be “done in lowly and self-emptying humility.”



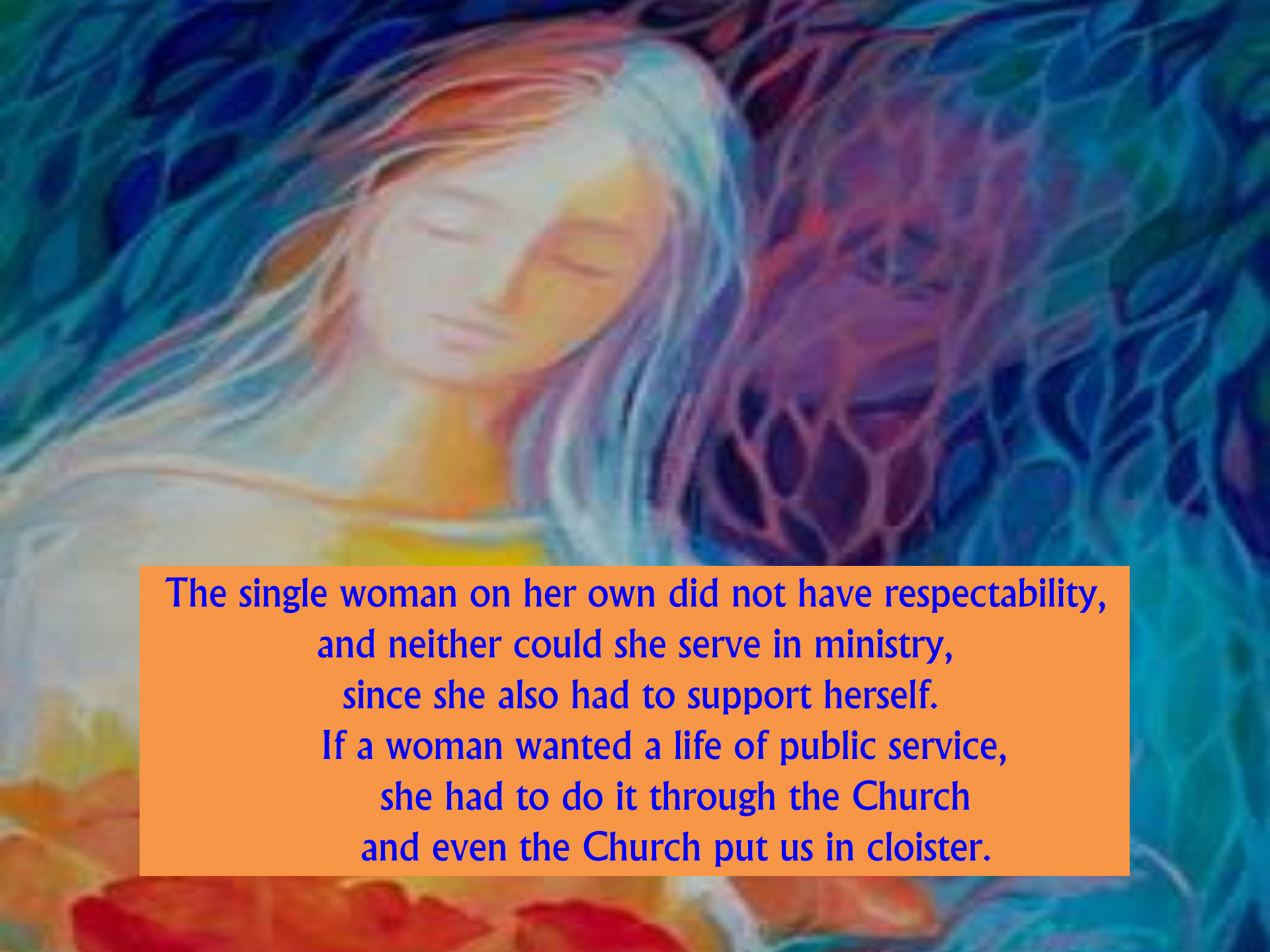
Of the first six Sisters,  
three were mature women  
with much experience.

Two were younger than I was,  
and I was 24. From the outset we were  
committed to helping women and girls.



**A single woman living in 17<sup>th</sup> century France had no status before the law, no rights, no education.**

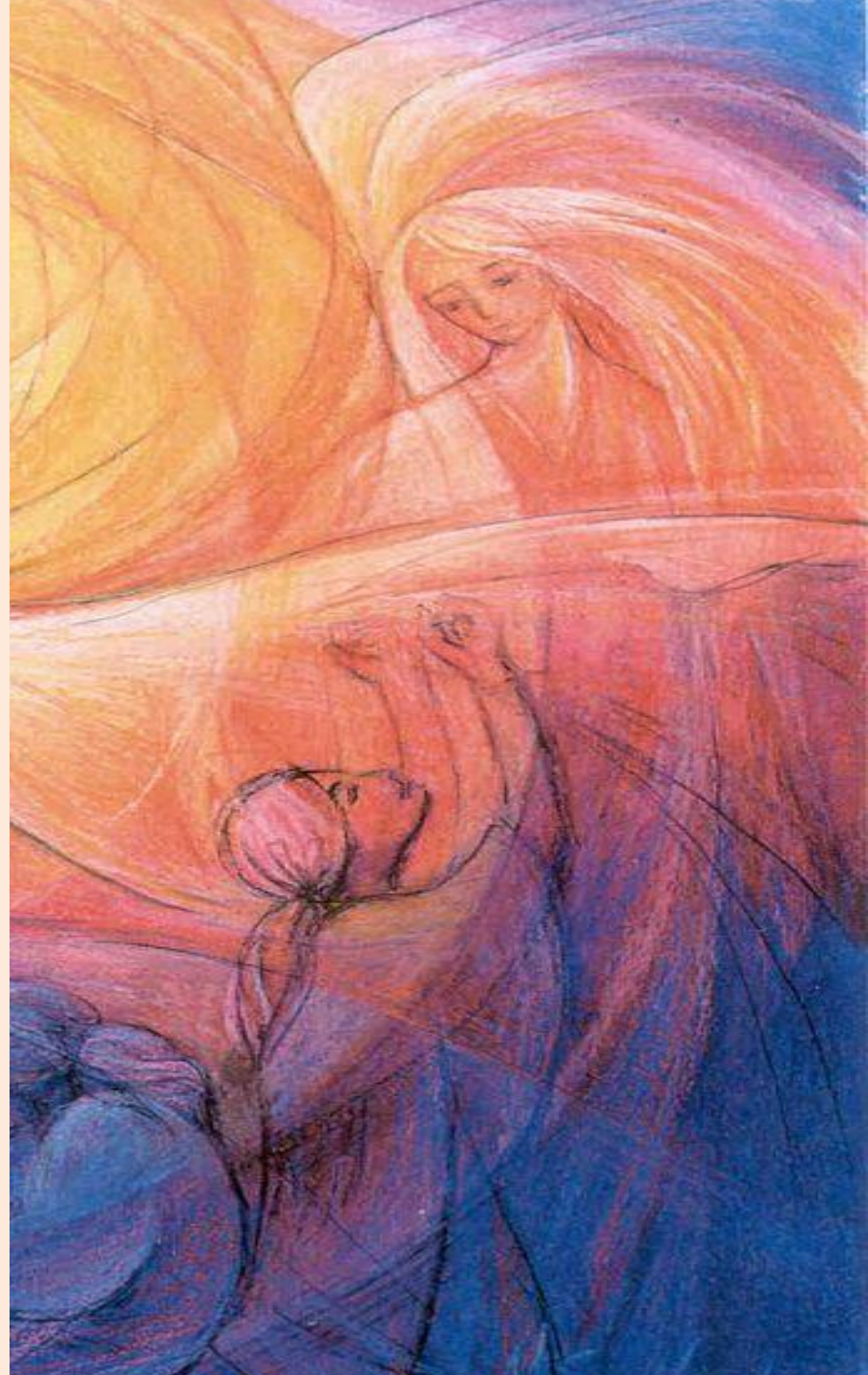
**I lived in an age when the working woman was at the bottom of the economic scale. There was no career for women in my 17<sup>th</sup> century world.**



The single woman on her own did not have respectability, and neither could she serve in ministry, since she also had to support herself. If a woman wanted a life of public service, she had to do it through the Church and even the Church put us in cloister.

The world of an unmarried woman in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was often as a domestic or textile worker, and many times these were the country girls who came to the city in search of work. If a servant, she usually was the victim of rape by her employer, or ended with an unwanted pregnancy.

Usually these girls were aged from twelve to fourteen. If one was fortunate to find a place of employment and wasn't raped or became an unwed mother, it would take her at least ten years to earn her own dowry. I saw many of these girls and women ... and my heart longed to help and protect them, but how?



Do you really know  
what it meant in my world of  
17<sup>th</sup> century France, to be  
told that a woman was  
**CAPABLE OF MINISTRY?**  
*It was revolutionary.*

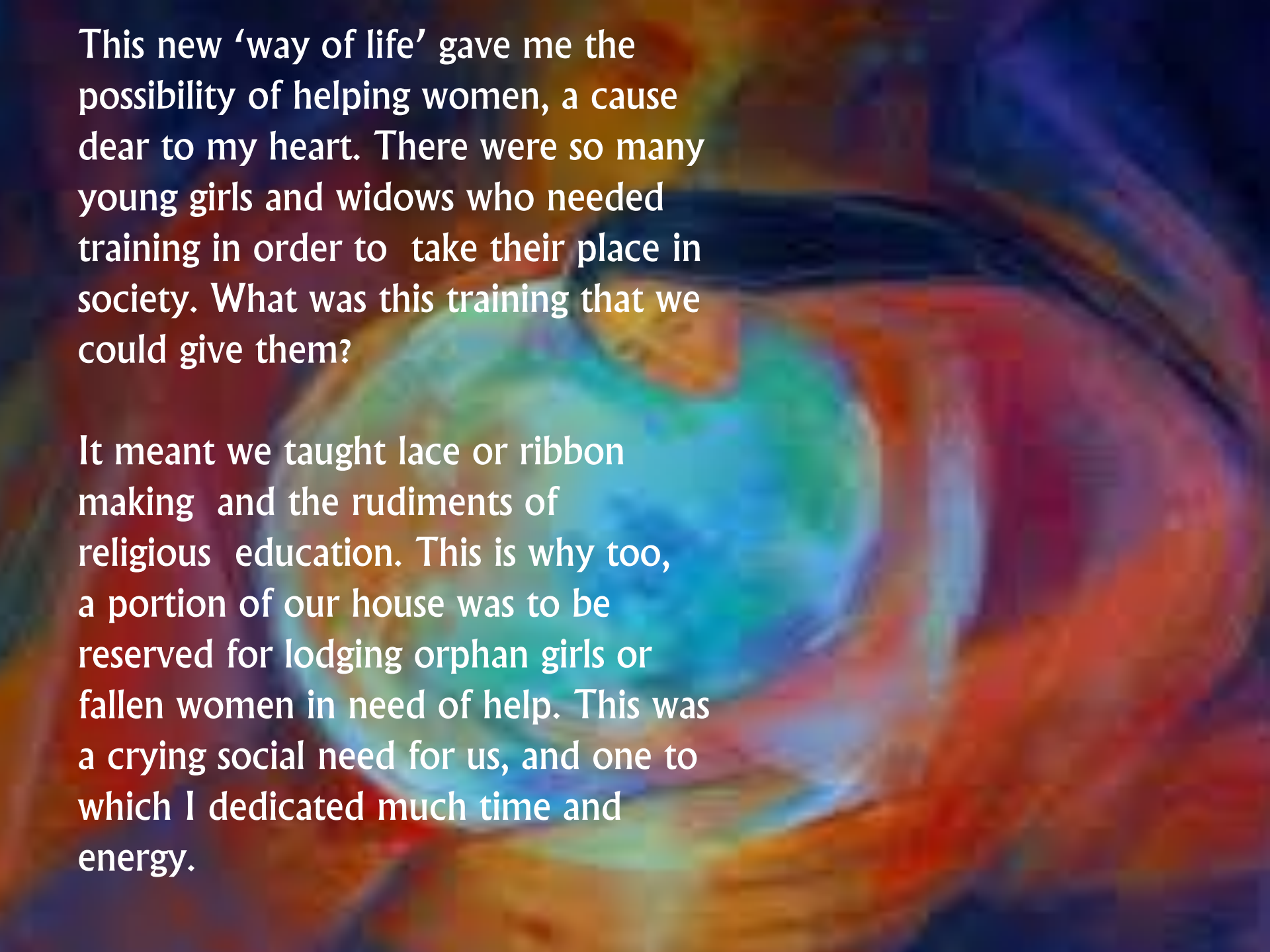
**But this was exactly  
what Fr Medaille did for us.  
He made a place for us in the  
church and world. My contact  
with Fr. Medaille opened up  
the possibility of this other  
way of life for me.**

**A new way of life... one of  
service to the dear neighbour  
whom I longed to serve,  
and a life of consecration to  
God, in Religious Life  
outside the cloister.**

I was 24, when I joined the first group of Sisters of St. Joseph

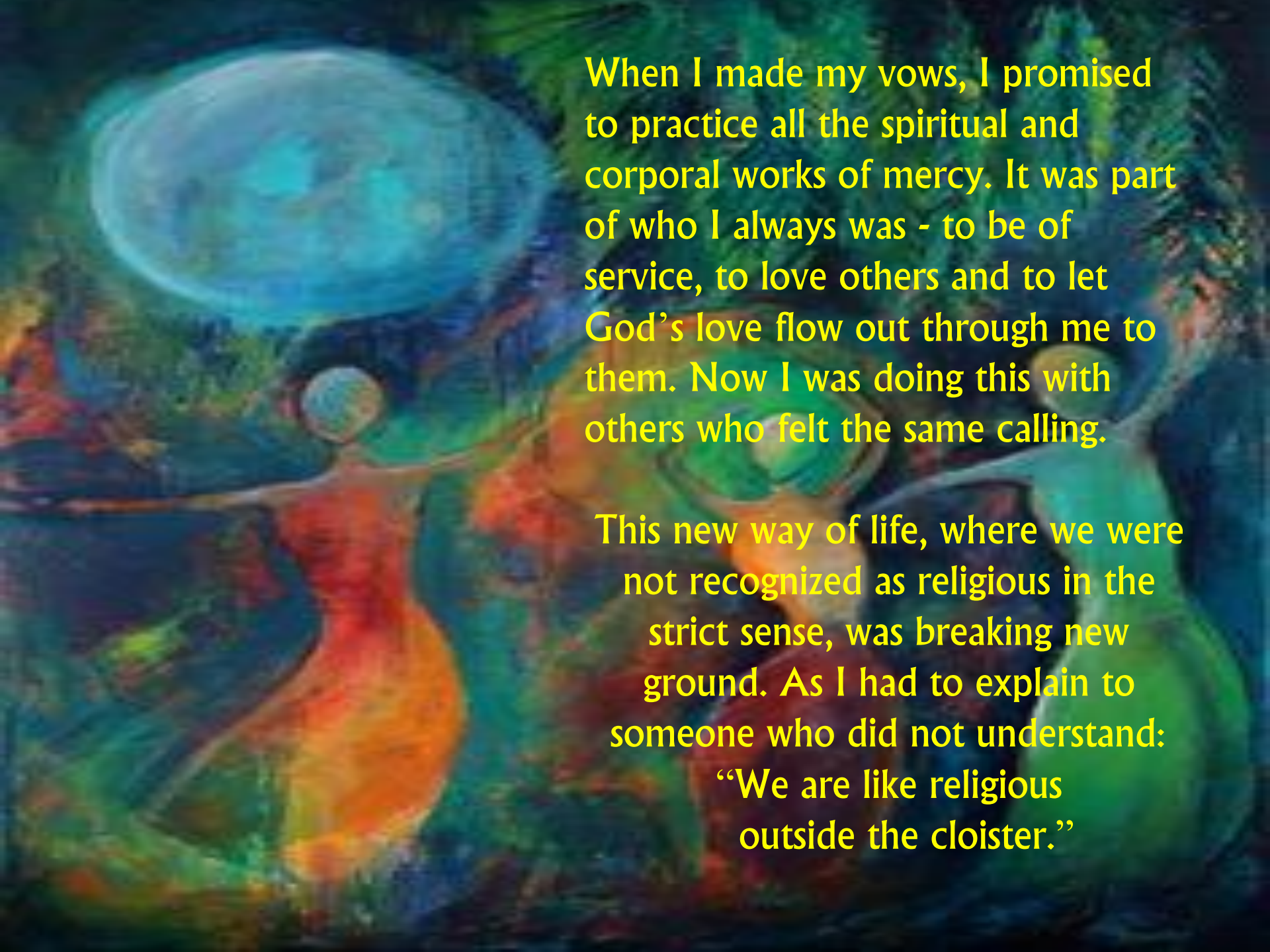






This new 'way of life' gave me the possibility of helping women, a cause dear to my heart. There were so many young girls and widows who needed training in order to take their place in society. What was this training that we could give them?

It meant we taught lace or ribbon making and the rudiments of religious education. This is why too, a portion of our house was to be reserved for lodging orphan girls or fallen women in need of help. This was a crying social need for us, and one to which I dedicated much time and energy.

A vibrant, abstract painting with swirling colors of blue, green, red, and orange. The composition features stylized human figures in a circular arrangement, possibly dancing or in a communal activity. The background is a complex, textured mix of these colors, creating a sense of movement and energy.

When I made my vows, I promised to practice all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. It was part of who I always was - to be of service, to love others and to let God's love flow out through me to them. Now I was doing this with others who felt the same calling.

This new way of life, where we were not recognized as religious in the strict sense, was breaking new ground. As I had to explain to someone who did not understand:

“We are like religious outside the cloister.”

**Fr Medaille had contact with, and was influenced by, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. He clearly connected the Blessed Sacrament and care of the sick with the beginnings of the Congregation.**

An abstract background featuring vibrant, swirling colors of blue, green, and yellow. The colors are blended and layered, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is reminiscent of a sunset or a dynamic, organic form.

**I had connections through my family  
with the same Company of the  
Blessed Sacrament.**

**They had an influence on my earlier  
life and later helped me greatly, as  
the communities spread.**

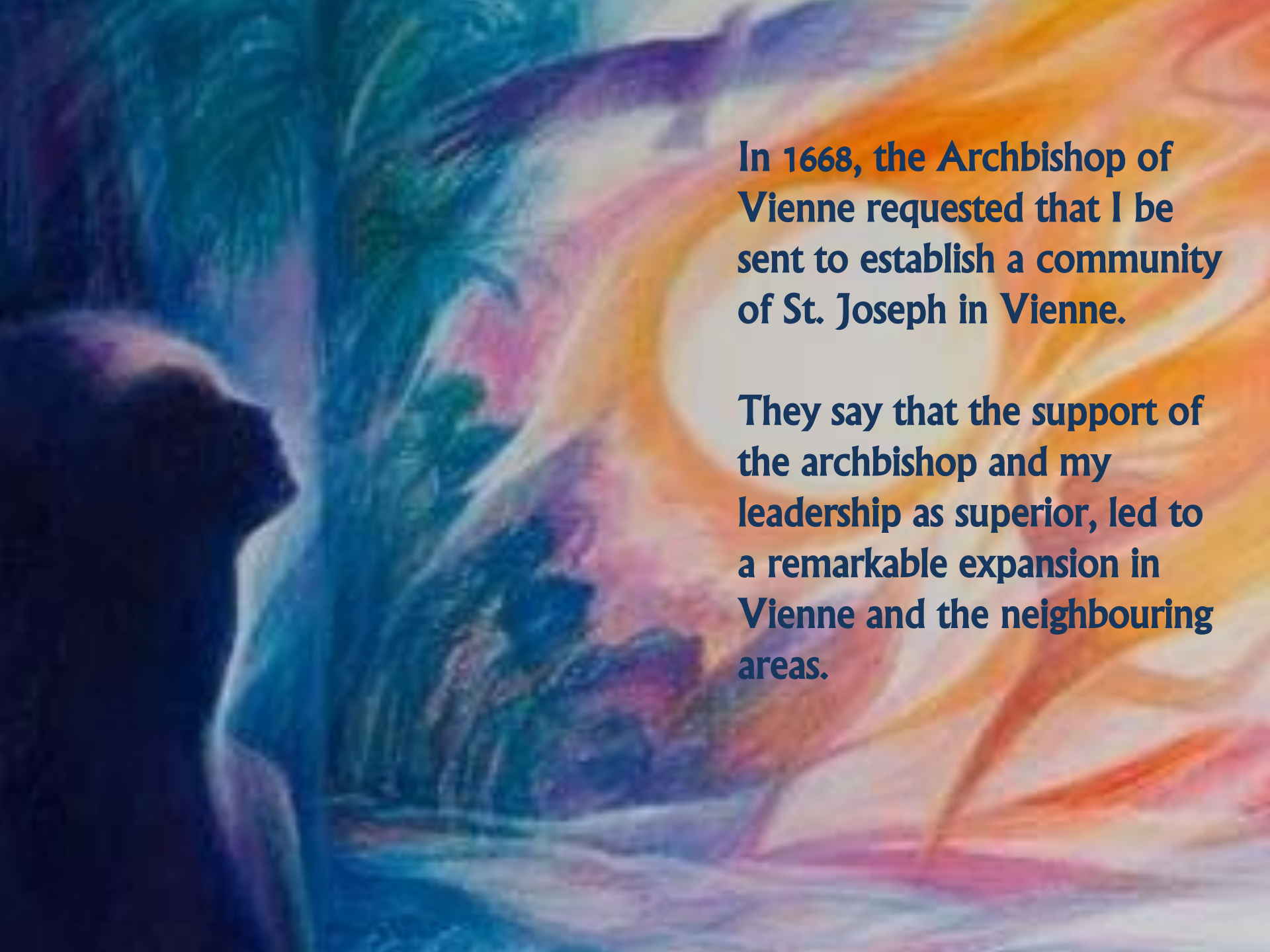


**I was involved in the founding  
of many houses  
outside Le Puy:**

**In 1660 I was superior of  
the community of Tence.  
Later from here we  
founded the community  
of Riotard.**

**The greatest number of  
foundations happened  
around the year 1660.  
It was so important for me  
to ensure the spirit of Fr.  
Medaille was alive in all  
our communities.**

**Riotard and Vienne  
became significant in the  
history of the Eucharistic  
Letter.**



**In 1668, the Archbishop of Vienne requested that I be sent to establish a community of St. Joseph in Vienne.**

**They say that the support of the archbishop and my leadership as superior, led to a remarkable expansion in Vienne and the neighbouring areas.**

The first new mission was at Gap in the French Alps, where I witnessed the misery of the poor in the small local hospital and offered to send three Sisters there to help. The Bishop and town councils responded positively.

Some years later, an epidemic among the troops passing through, swamped the hospital and all the hospital sisters died as a result of caring for them. I later sent sisters to replace them.



**I was superior in Vienne until my death in 1700. I had started ten new foundations, in hospitals or houses of refuge in neighbouring areas.**

**These all depended on Vienne in various ways... formation, financial assistance, spiritual books etc.**

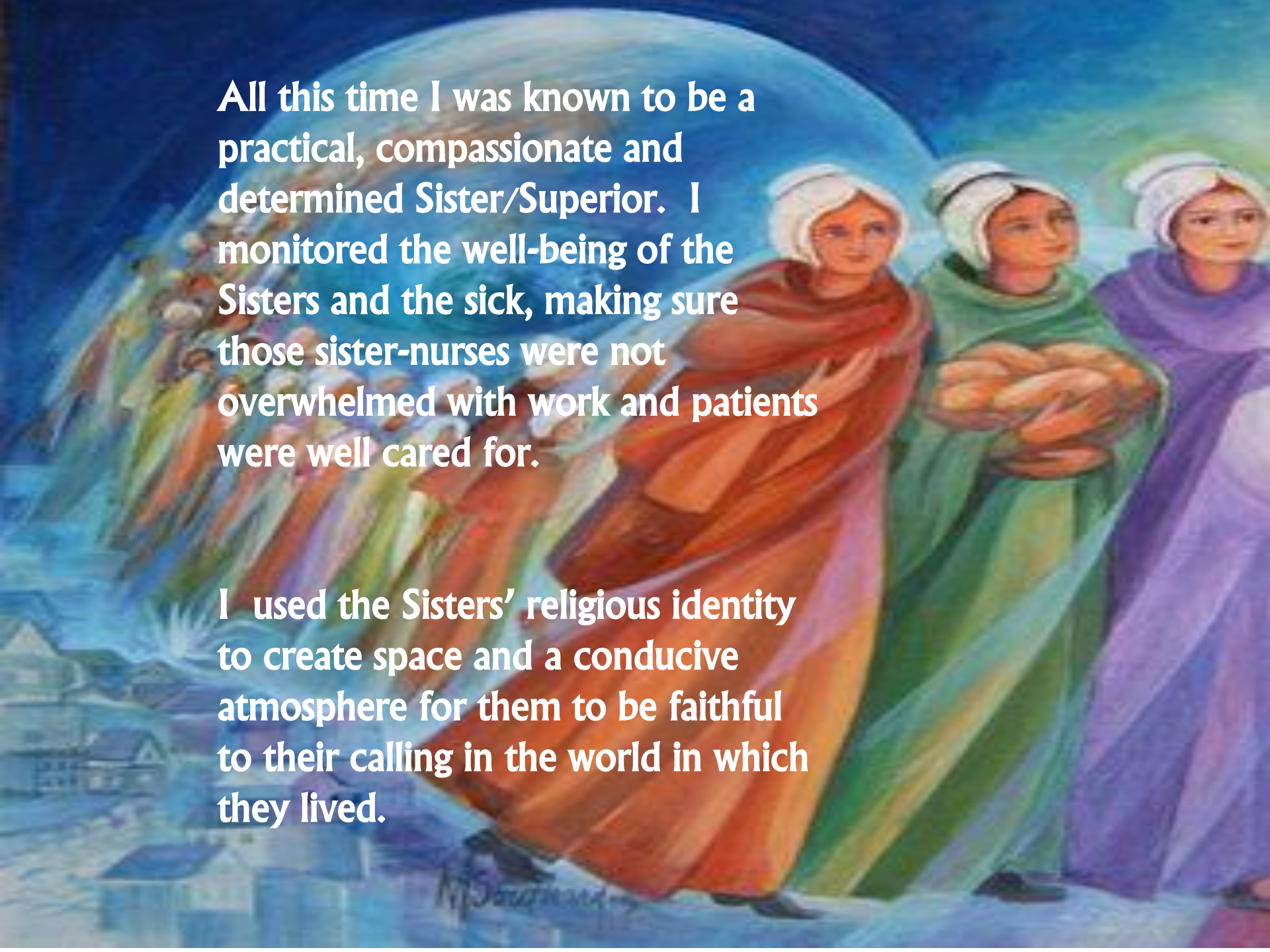
**This was an enormous challenge and I wanted the communities to grow and spread, but above all to remain faithful to the spirit of Fr. Medaille.**





The **rapid expansion** presented some logistical problems, because transmission of the handwritten constitutions to numerous houses led to variations, discrepancies and misinterpretations of the spirit.

I took the lead in organizing a group of Sisters to compare the different texts and formulate an acceptable text, true to the spirit of Fr. Medaille. I obtained permission to have an official copy printed in Vienne. In Nov. 1694 the first printed constitutions appeared. You have a copy of this in your  
Annecy Archives.



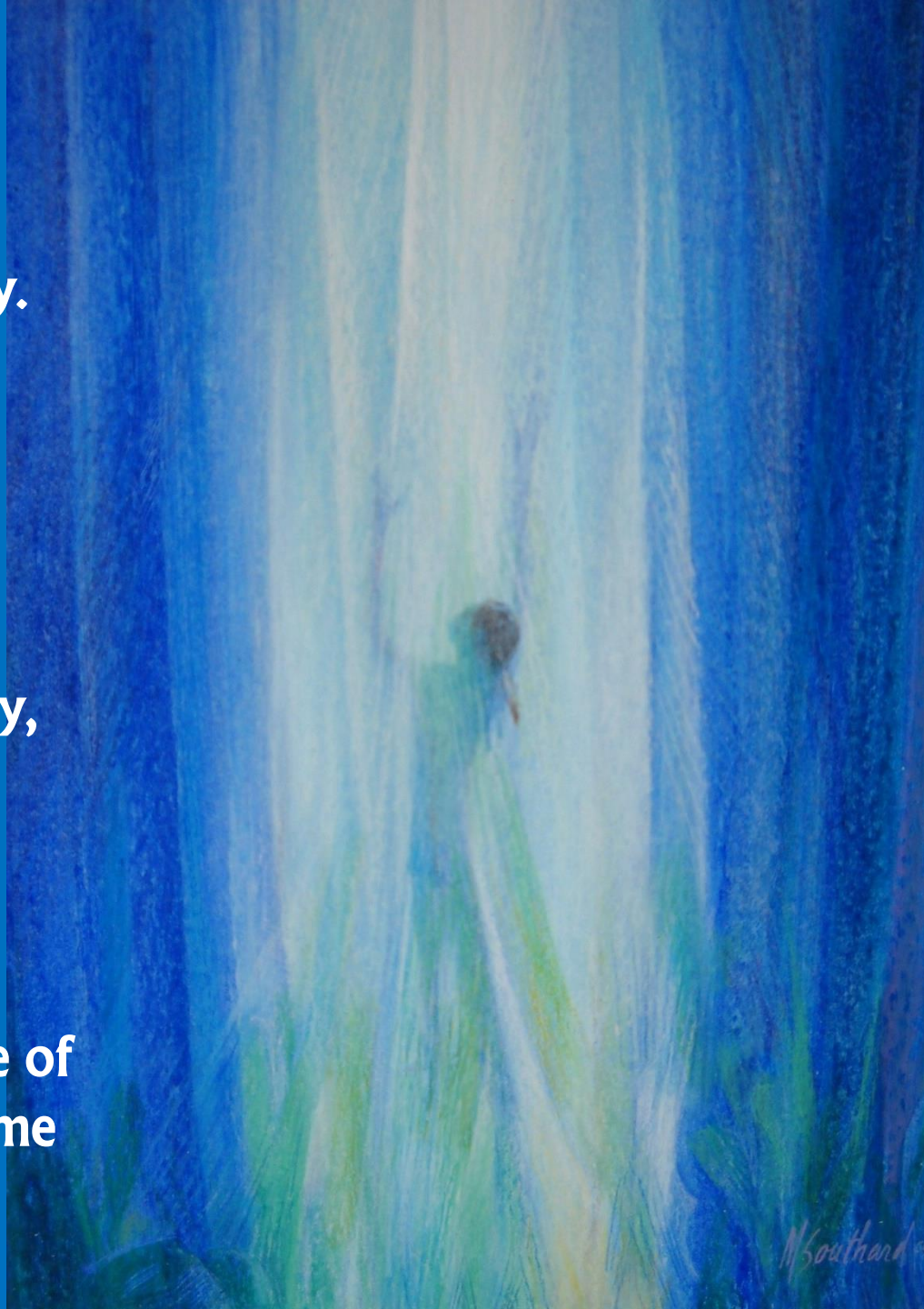
**All this time I was known to be a practical, compassionate and determined Sister/Superior. I monitored the well-being of the Sisters and the sick, making sure those sister-nurses were not overwhelmed with work and patients were well cared for.**

**I used the Sisters' religious identity to create space and a conducive atmosphere for them to be faithful to their calling in the world in which they lived.**

**Unfortunately my legacy was considerably weakened after class pressures made themselves felt within the Vienne community.**

**The influence of a wealthy aristocratic benefactor had caused a number of young upper class women, who were very conscious of class and money, to be admitted as novices to the convent. I struggled with this.**

**There was at the same time complaints about the Sister's care of the sick. This was a big cross for me at the time.**





The ‘monastic temptation’ played a powerful part in happenings in the Vienne community.

At this time, in this part of France, women in solemn vows and cloister enjoyed status as “true religious” with special privileges.

Women with simple vows and no cloister, were seen as “lesser religious” and had no claim to society’s special consideration and respect.

The Sisters in Vienne began to want to be “Real Religious” - cloistered - and all that went with it.

The irony of all this is that what Fr. Medaille was calling us to was the exact opposite of the cloistered, recognized life.

“Be hidden and self-emptied” was what he challenged us to be and become. He saw as gain the littleness and insignificance of the small and hidden life.

The Vienne community continued their rumblings, and in 1777 the community at Vienne became officially cloistered.



I was very conscious of the need to keep our lives faithful to the ideal that Fr. Medaille set before us... a life hidden and totally given, a life of love and surrender and service, a life that looked for no influence and recognition.

I was always trying to ensure that our Sisters had all they needed to live this life and in the best atmosphere they could.

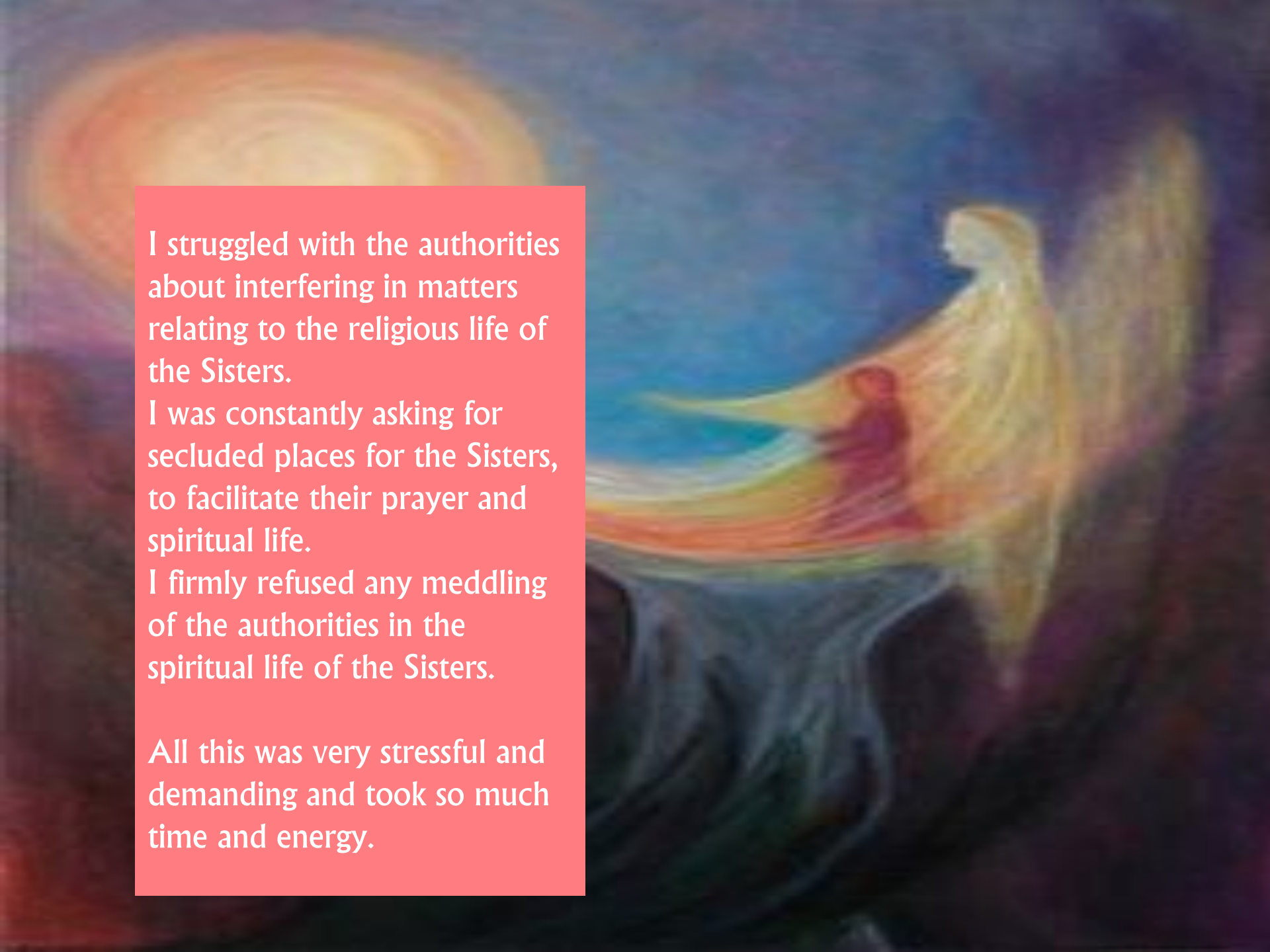


**I now ask you to try to visualize my life from 1660 onwards. I was caught up in so many foundations, so many pressures from within the communities...some wanting to go back to being what they considered to be “real religious”.**

**Then the pressures from outside, wealthy benefactors wanting to influence the admission of subjects. I had to deal with all of this, while trying to remain faithful to my calling as a Sister of St Joseph.**

**It was a very difficult and confusing time.**





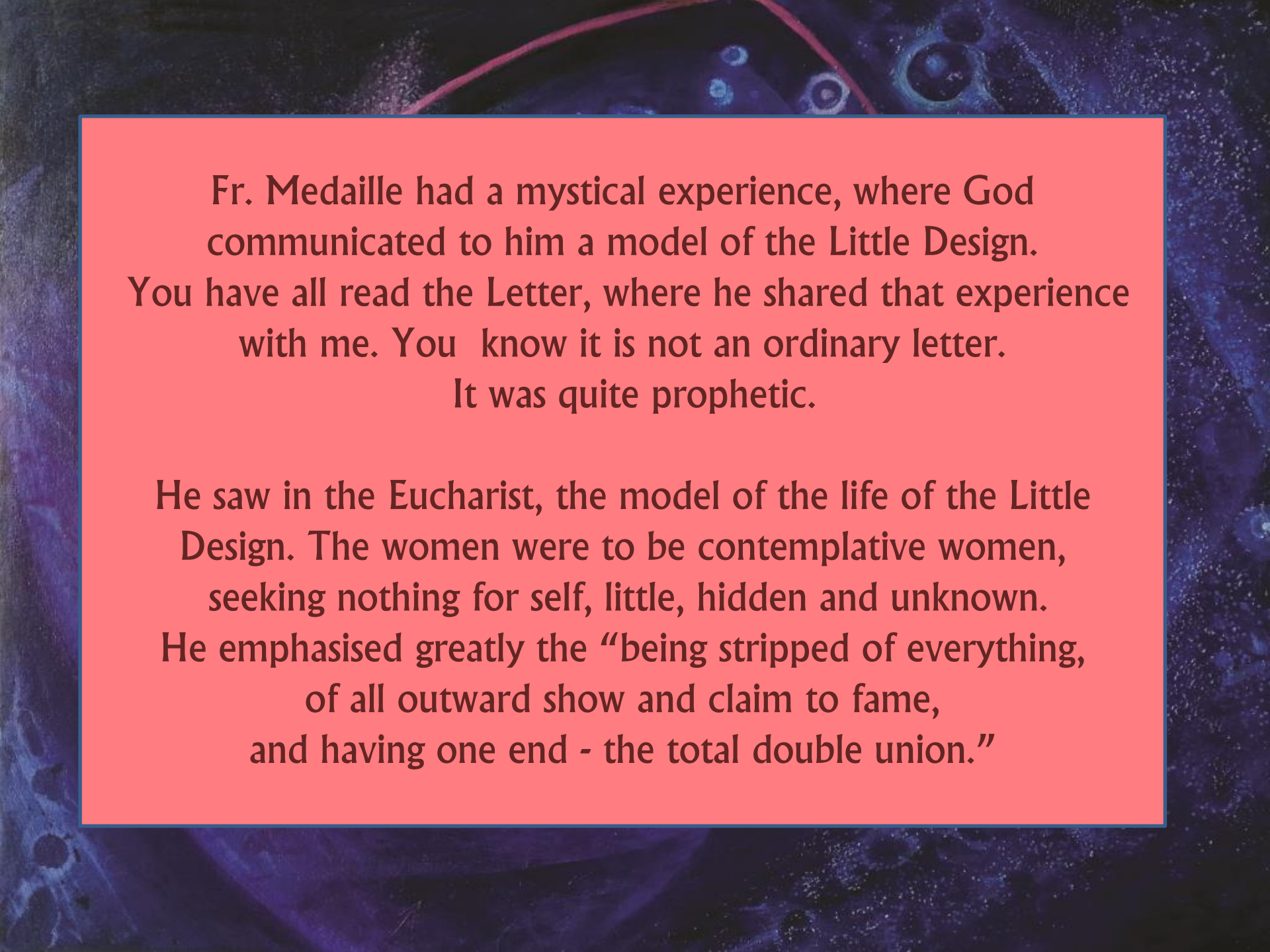
I struggled with the authorities about interfering in matters relating to the religious life of the Sisters.

I was constantly asking for secluded places for the Sisters, to facilitate their prayer and spiritual life.

I firmly refused any meddling of the authorities in the spiritual life of the Sisters.

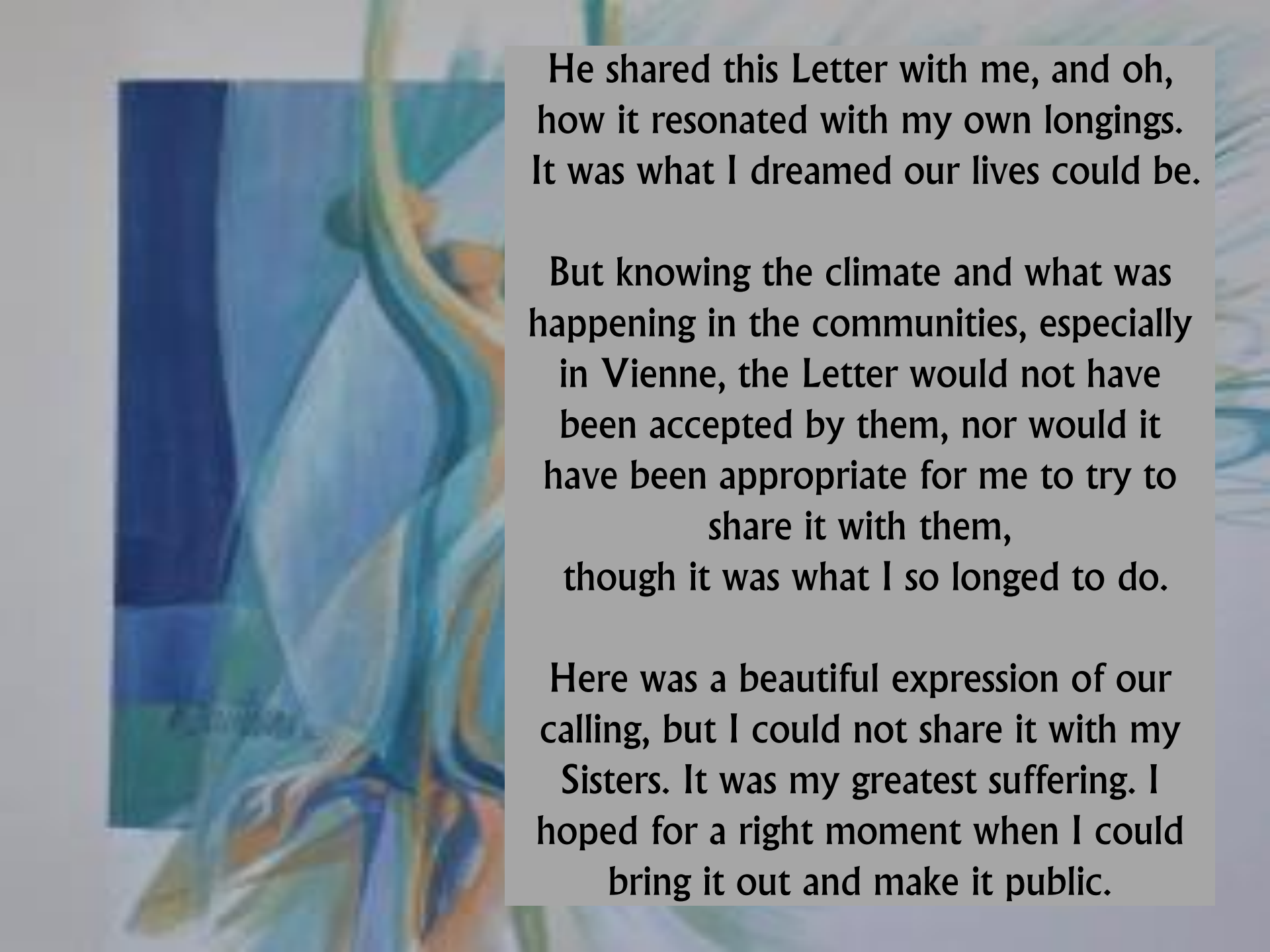
All this was very stressful and demanding and took so much time and energy.





Fr. Medaille had a mystical experience, where God communicated to him a model of the Little Design. You have all read the Letter, where he shared that experience with me. You know it is not an ordinary letter. It was quite prophetic.

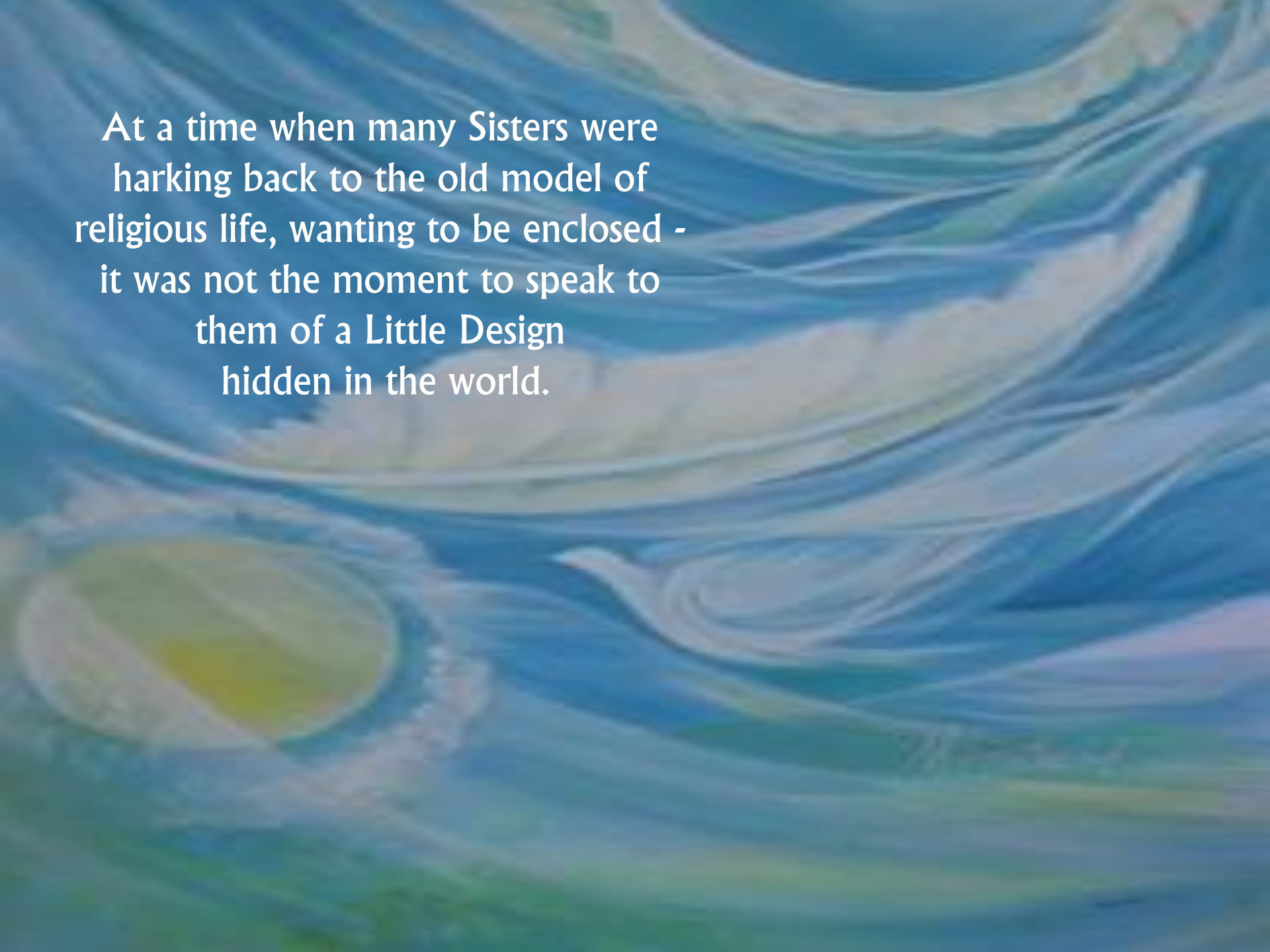
He saw in the Eucharist, the model of the life of the Little Design. The women were to be contemplative women, seeking nothing for self, little, hidden and unknown. He emphasised greatly the “being stripped of everything, of all outward show and claim to fame, and having one end - the total double union.”



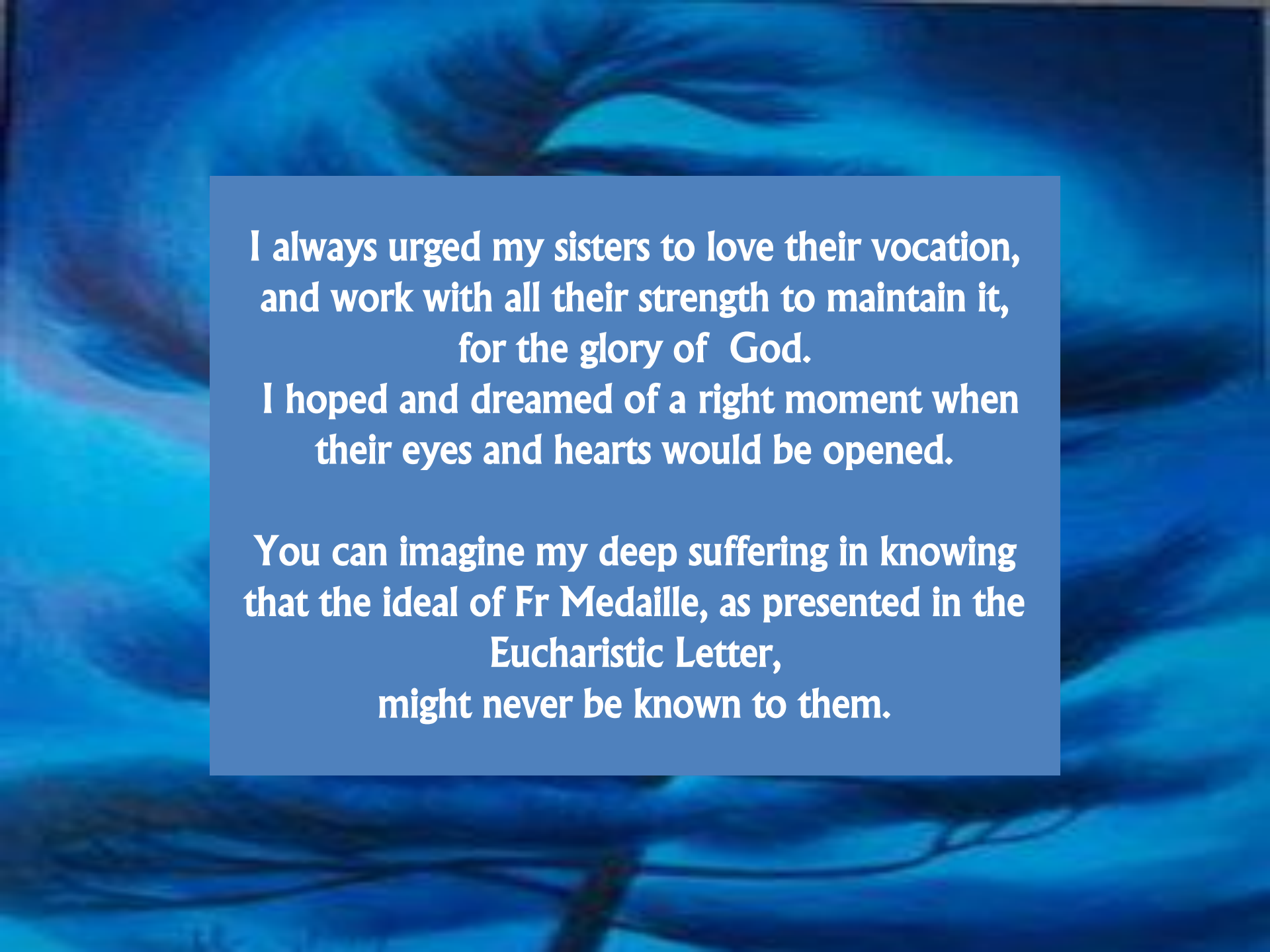
He shared this Letter with me, and oh, how it resonated with my own longings. It was what I dreamed our lives could be.

But knowing the climate and what was happening in the communities, especially in Vienne, the Letter would not have been accepted by them, nor would it have been appropriate for me to try to share it with them, though it was what I so longed to do.

Here was a beautiful expression of our calling, but I could not share it with my Sisters. It was my greatest suffering. I hoped for a right moment when I could bring it out and make it public.



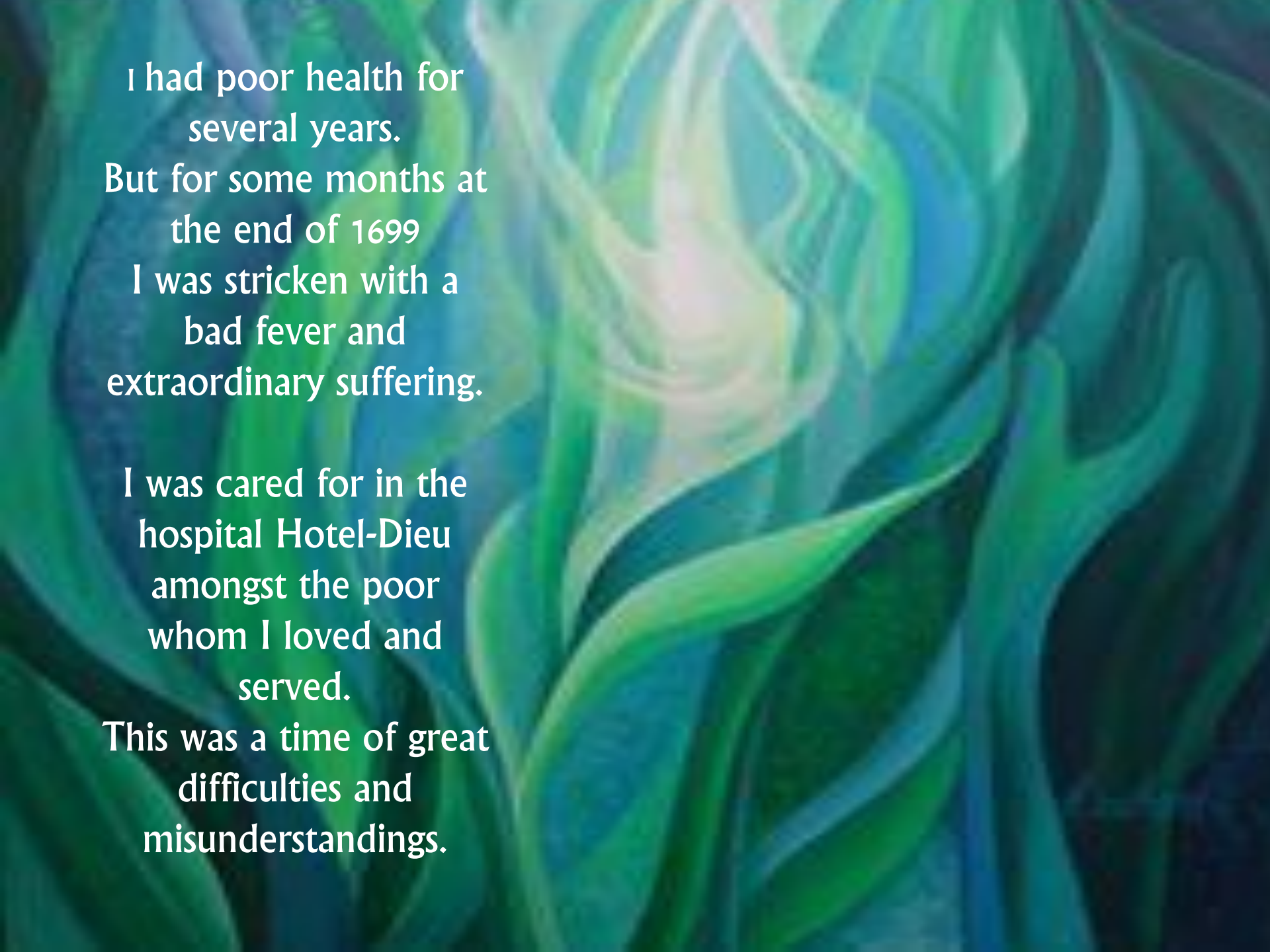
At a time when many Sisters were harking back to the old model of religious life, wanting to be enclosed - it was not the moment to speak to them of a Little Design hidden in the world.



**I always urged my sisters to love their vocation,  
and work with all their strength to maintain it,  
for the glory of God.**

**I hoped and dreamed of a right moment when  
their eyes and hearts would be opened.**

**You can imagine my deep suffering in knowing  
that the ideal of Fr Medaille, as presented in the  
Eucharistic Letter,  
might never be known to them.**

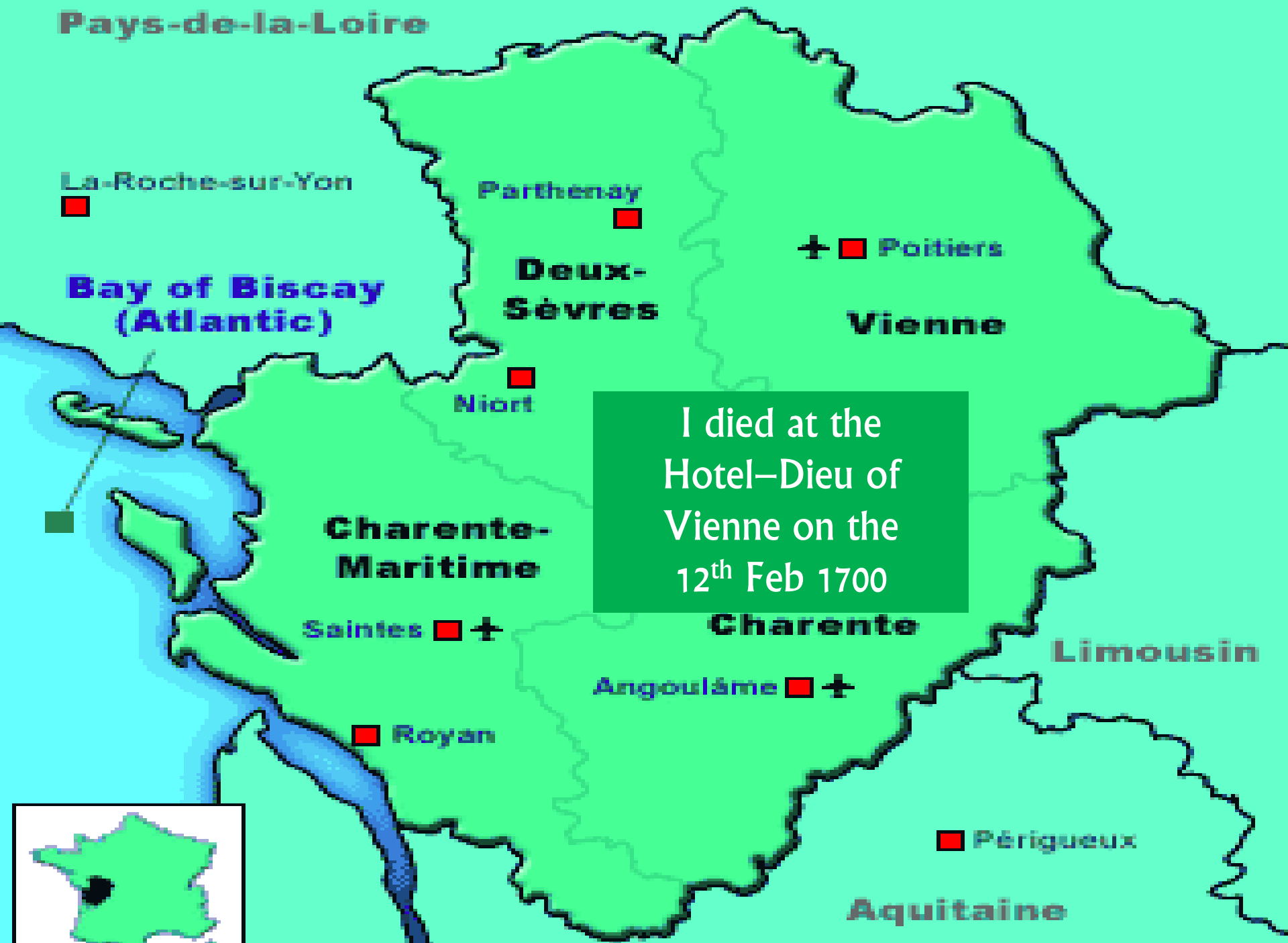


I had poor health for  
several years.  
But for some months at  
the end of 1699  
I was stricken with a  
bad fever and  
extraordinary suffering.

I was cared for in the  
hospital Hotel-Dieu  
amongst the poor  
whom I loved and  
served.

This was a time of great  
difficulties and  
misunderstandings.

# Pays-de-la-Loire



La-Roche-sur-Yon



Parthenay



✝ Poitiers

Bay of Biscay  
(Atlantic)

Deux-  
Sèvres

Vienne

Niort



I died at the  
Hotel-Dieu of  
Vienne on the  
12<sup>th</sup> Feb 1700

Charente-  
Maritime

Saintes ✝



Charente

Angoulême ✝



Limousin

Royan

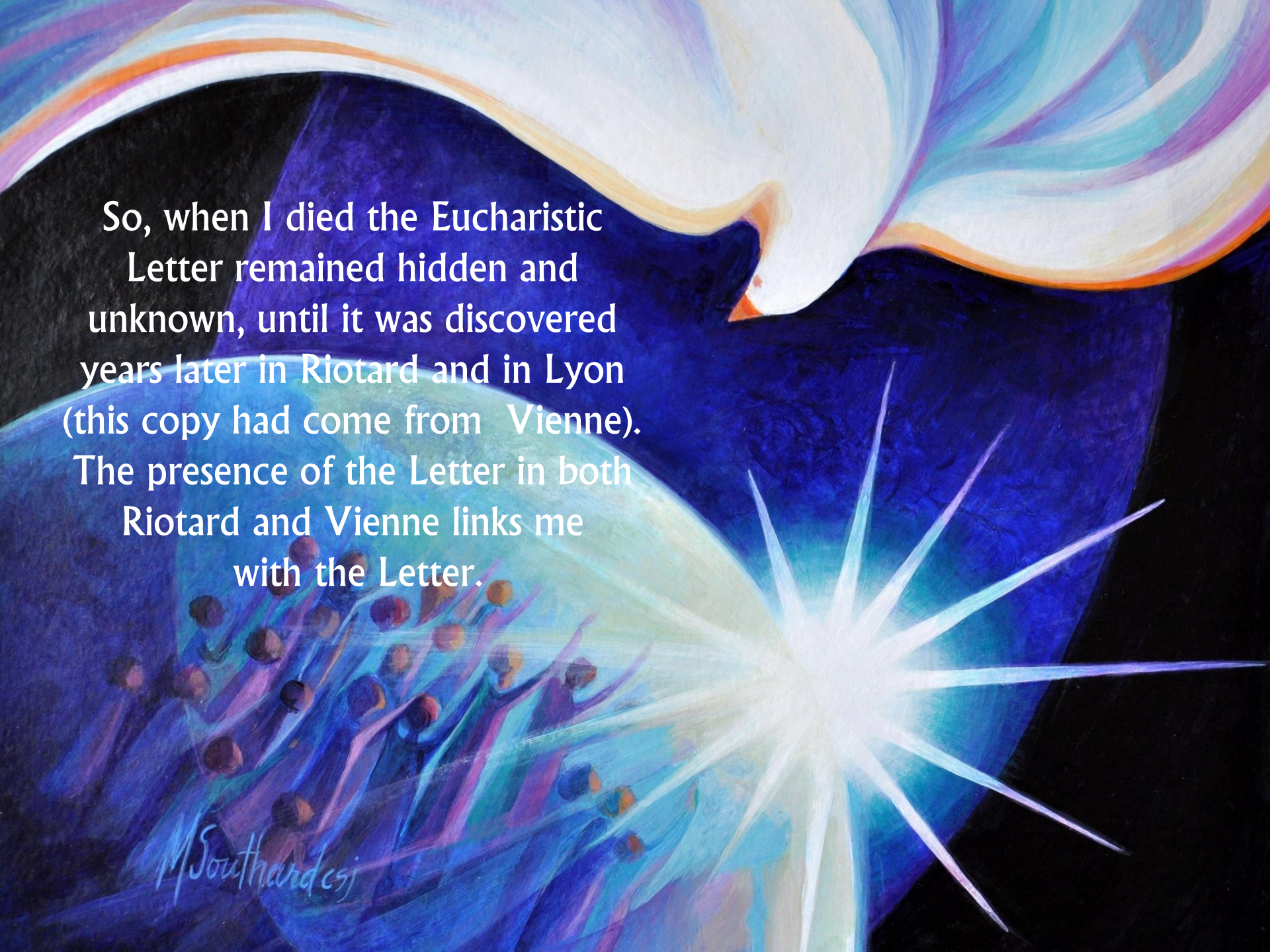


Périgueux



Aquitaine





So, when I died the Eucharistic Letter remained hidden and unknown, until it was discovered years later in Riotard and in Lyon (this copy had come from Vienne). The presence of the Letter in both Riotard and Vienne links me with the Letter.

*M. Southard esj*



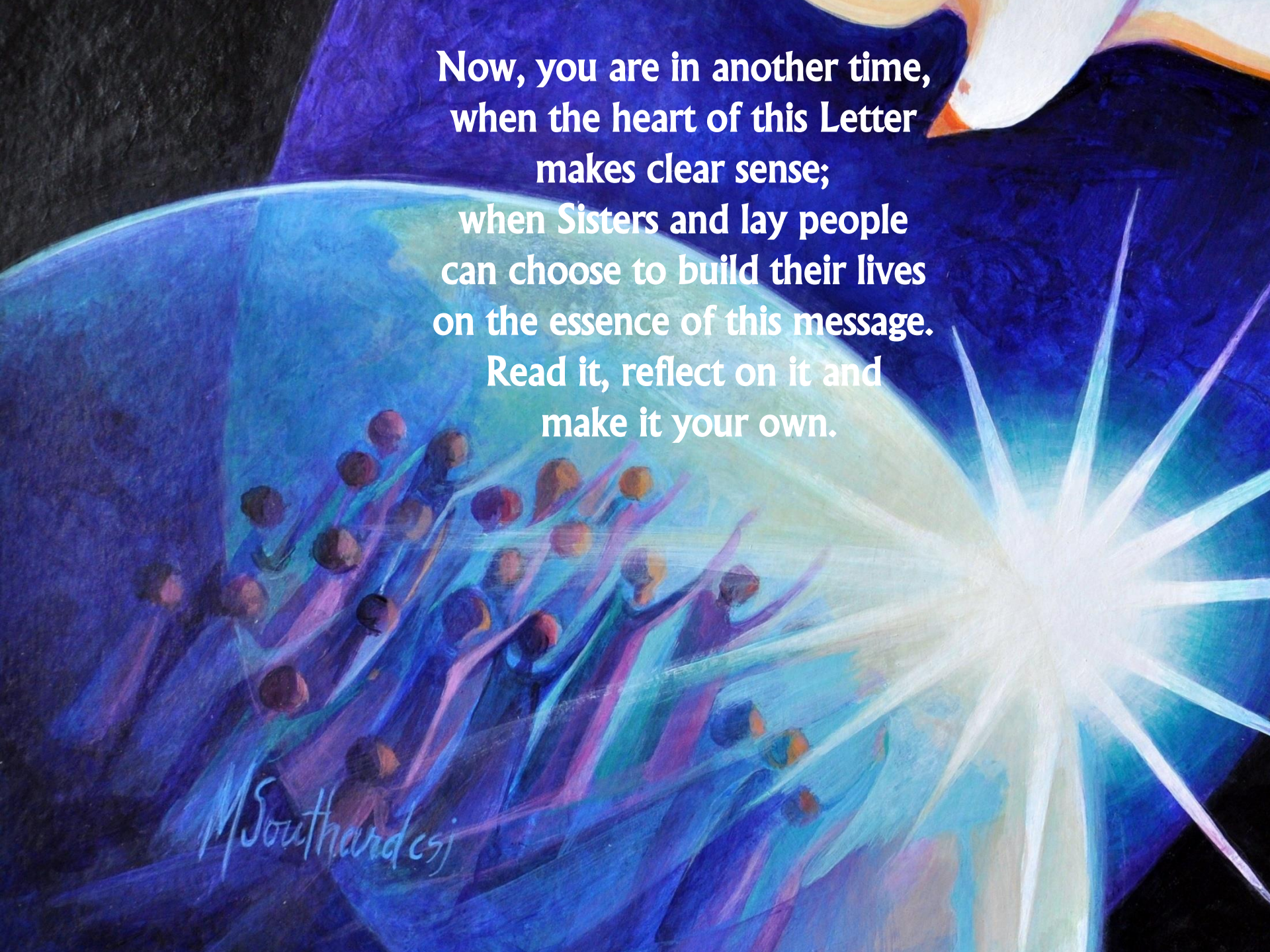
In order to work for the total double union, so dear to the heart of Fr. Medaille, and to our vocation, I had to be content to keep the Letter as a treasure in my heart, and in my records; and as a model in my own life, without imposing it.

I knew there would come a right moment when hearts would be open and burn with a great desire to live the heart of this message. The moment was not then, but it is NOW.



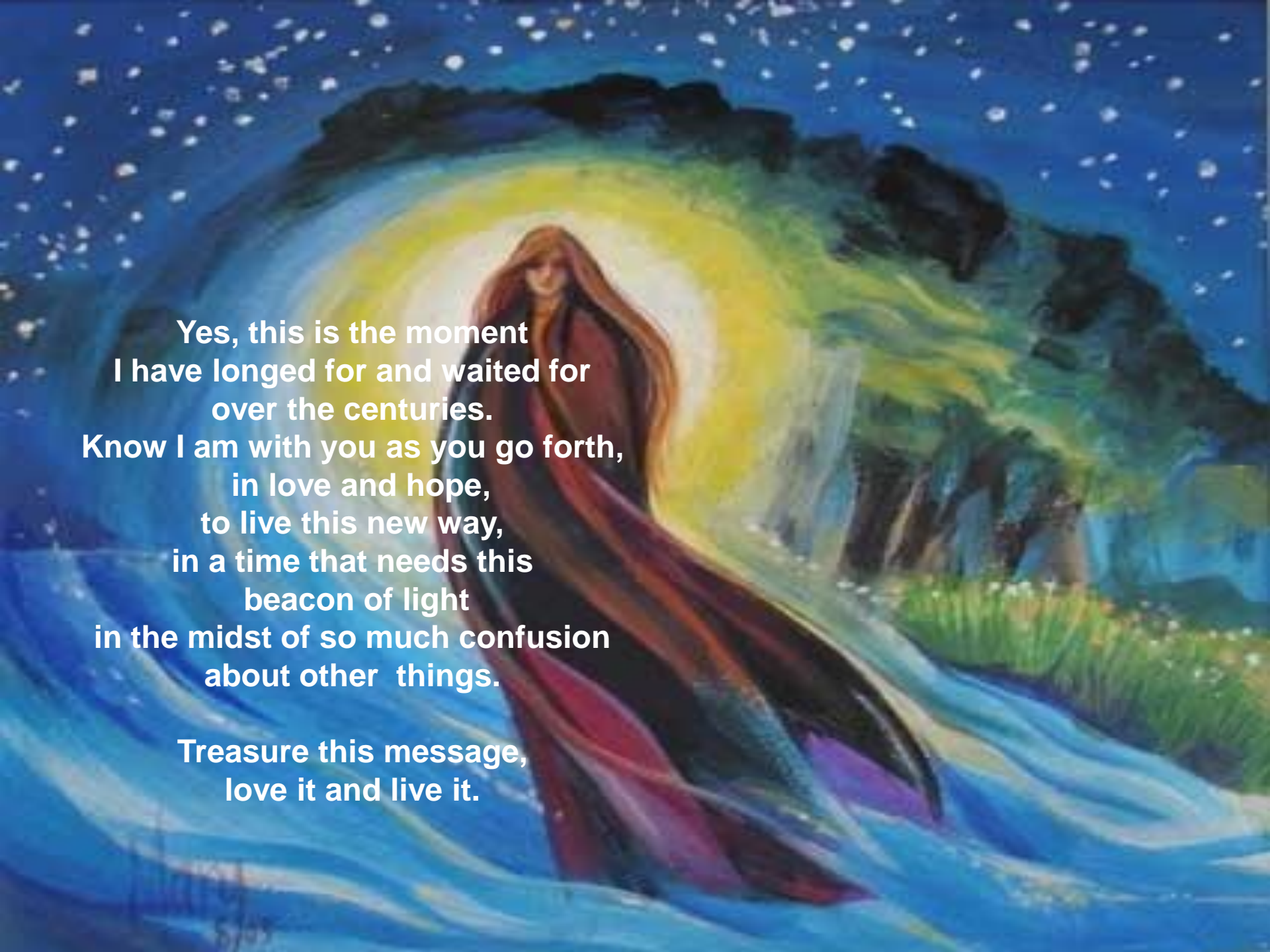


**So my dear friends, is NOW the moment ?  
Open your hearts and souls to the richness of this message.  
Run with it into our world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.  
The time is NOW.**




Now, you are in another time,  
when the heart of this Letter  
makes clear sense;  
when Sisters and lay people  
can choose to build their lives  
on the essence of this message.  
Read it, reflect on it and  
make it your own.

M. Southard esj



**Yes, this is the moment  
I have longed for and waited for  
over the centuries.  
Know I am with you as you go forth,  
in love and hope,  
to live this new way,  
in a time that needs this  
beacon of light  
in the midst of so much confusion  
about other things.**

**Treasure this message,  
love it and live it.**



**May your hopes, dreams  
and challenges for the future,  
resonate with what you hear  
in the Eucharistic Letter today.**

**May you recognize yourself as part of this  
magnificent Little Design Movement,  
created in love, and suffused with hope  
and belonging.**

**May you have a passion for life, and with  
others, create a world where the message  
of the Eucharistic Letter is shared,  
and lived among you  
in little Design Communities.**

**Yes, the time is right and the time is now.  
Have courage.  
Your Beloved Sister,**

***Marguerite***

Little Design Communities



Circling the World with Love

Presentation lovingly created by  
Monica Hartnett, SSJ, London, UK.

Thank you, Mary Southard, CSJ, for use of your art images.