

maria  
droste



***Blessed Maria Droste zu Vishcering***

# **maria droste**

**A translation of**

**... PIU NOBILE PER CARITA**

**by A. Ricciardi**

**Translated by Frances Warnig  
1996**

## DECLARATION

*In writing this biography, the author declares in all things his submission to the Decree of Urban VIII. In relating the events contained herein, he makes no assumptions other than those implied by the ordinary sense of his words, and the credibility of the documentation given, reserving the judgment concerning anything beyond this to the Holy Roman Church alone.*

Nihil obstat: Daniel V. Flynn, J.C.D.  
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: + James P. Mahoney, D.D.  
Vicar-General, Archdiocese of New York

New York, New York  
May 18, 1976

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat and imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

Copyright @ 1976  
Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
Province of New York

## CONTENTS

Author's Foreword	6
Introduction	9
Chapter I - The Young Maria Droste zu Vischering (1863-1883)	11
Chapter II - In the Arms of Providence (1883-1888)	44
Chapter III - The Good Shepherd of Munster (1888-1894)	65
Chapter IV - The Good Shepherd of Oporto (1894-1899)	100
Chapter V - The Witness and Message of Blessed Maria Droste	200
Appendix I - Formula of Act of Consecration Composed by Blessed Maria Droste	210
Appendix II - Formula Prescribed by Leo XIII for the Universal Consecration of June 11, 1899	211
Appendix III - Decree Concerning the Heroicity of Virtue	212
Appendix IV - Decree Concerning the Miracles	217

## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

In writing this book I had two goals in mind: first, to make known the "figura nobilissima" who was Maria Droste zu Vischering; and secondly, to move the reader to a deeper love of the Heart of Jesus.

The assignment of postulator for the cause of beatification of Sister Droste was confided to me In 1966 by Sister Aquinas Lee, then Superior General of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. At that time Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering had already been declared Venerable, for the decree establishing the heroicity of her virtues had been promulgated by Pope Paul VI on February 13, 1964.

My principal task as postulator has been to present at the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints the miracles obtained through the intercession of Sister Maria and to promote the medical and theological investigation of the cure of young Isabella dos Santos, which took place in Oporto, Portugal, in 1952. This investigation was crowned with success, for on October 3, 1975, Pope Paul VI confirmed by decree that the cure had indeed been miraculous.

I must confess that since 1966 not a day has passed without my praying to the Lord that Sister Maria might be beatified and without my venerating her because of her extraordinary holiness especially as seen in the manner in which she bore her sufferings and in her spirit of expiative victim.

I was well acquainted with the various biographies of Sister Maria written by expert authors, and I never dreamed of writing one myself. However as time went on and her beatification during the Holy Year 1975 grew in certainty, the promoters of the cause, after the last discussion on July 8 of the miracle, felt an urgent need for an updated biography in the Italian language. I had the presumption to offer to prepare this new biographical profile of Sister Droste. The time at my disposal was very little, and I do not

hesitate to state that I have carried on this work more with my heart than with my head.

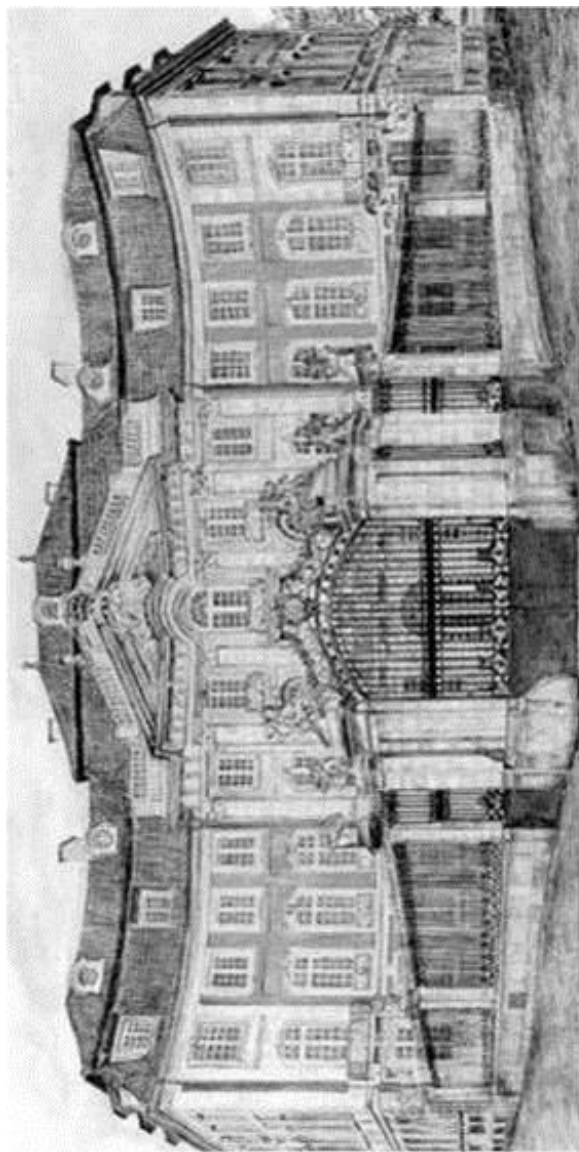
Yet, I feel that the person of Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering is made sufficiently clear in these pages so that she is seen as the sacrificial person she was, one who lived out her life in the love of the Heart of Jesus and in a spirit of reparation for the ingratitude of men towards Him Who has loved us so much. I will be more than content, and I know the Sisters of the Good Shepherd-they who are sisters to the new Beata-will also be content, if this present biography reawakens in hearts an ardent love for the Heart of Jesus.

While I was writing I thought a great deal about myself and my brothers in the priesthood. Is it not from the Heart of Jesus that we must daily draw love for souls and zeal for their salvation? May Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering, who prayed and suffered so much for priests, stimulate us to give ourselves fully to our priesthood in order that we may lead persons to understand the infinite treasures of mercy in the Heart of Jesus.

Rome

First Friday, October 3, 1975.

A. Ricciardi



The Erbdrostenhof, family manor in Münster where Maria was born



## INTRODUCTION

The life of Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering is an important page in the history of the Church, for Maria was the soul of that spiritual momentum which led to the consecration by Pope Leo XIII of the human race to the Heart of Jesus at the close of the nineteenth century. Maria died on the vigil of the consecration, at the age of thirty-six. A year later, on June 1, 1900, when the Pontiff received in audience the superior general of the Good Shepherd of Angers, he recalled Maria Droste zu Vischering and said of her, "I found her to be spiritually united to God with an extraordinary zeal for the salvation of souls."

In that same jubilee year, receiving in audience the family of the Beata, he laid his hand on the head of Count Clement Droste zu Vischering saying, "Here is the father of a saint." As the Pope had personally studied and had caused experts to study the ascetical and mystical personality of Maria Droste, his words have special value.

The glorification by the Church of Maria Droste zu Vischering came during the jubilee year of 1975, which marked the end of the third centenary of the revelations of the Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, the French, mystic of Paray-le-Monial.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "When will we learn to write the history of the Church with the lives of her saints?" The biographical reconstruction of the life of Maria Droste demonstrates that the history of the Church can indeed be written by the lives of her saints.



*The Droste family in 1877 (Maria is second from the right)*



*Countess and Count Droste zu Vischering in 1990*

## Chapter I

### THE YOUNG MARIA DROSTE

#### ZU VISCHERING (1863-1883)

The first twenty years of Maria's life were passed in a heroic period of the history of Westphalia, that region of West Germany which can be compared to French Brittany because of the courageous resistance of its Catholics to the legalized persecution of the Kulturkampf. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was trying to force the Church to submit to state domination, and in this, Maria's family counted among his staunchest adversaries. From this people, proudly Catholic, Maria Droste grew into a worthy daughter of the Church.

#### *The Droste zu Vischering Family*

The Droste zu Vischerings is one of the oldest families of the Westphalian aristocracy. The ancient name Wulfheim had, in the twelfth century, been replaced by that of Droste, a title which accompanied a responsibility similar to that of a majordomo at the court of the prince-bishops of Munster. In 1272 "Vischering" was added to the family name. "Vischering" was taken from the name of an ancient castle near the city of Ludingausen, one of the most extensive properties of the Droste family.

The family, always known for its deep loyalty to the faith, became in the nineteenth century, outstanding for its heroic defense of the rights of the Church. In the first half of the century, two great uncles of Maria's father were doubly brothers by blood and by firm faith and ardent zeal for the Church. The elder, Gaspard Maximilian (1770-1846), Auxiliary Bishop of Munster, participated in the national council of Paris of 1811. He requested the Emperor to free Pius VIII, then a prisoner at Savoy. The second, Clement Augustus (1773-1845), Archbishop of Cologne, publicized the errors of Hermes which had been condemned the Holy See but protected by the civil powers. He also courageously

upheld the decision of the Church with regard to mixed marriage. Archbishop Clement Augustus clashed with the Prussian government and in 1837 was arrested during the night and held prisoner in the fortress of Minden for eighteen months. His imprisonment profoundly impressed the Catholic world, and Gregory XVI in a consistory of cardinals energetically protested this injustice.<sup>1</sup>

While these two prelates were witnessing their fidelity to the Church, their eldest brother, Adolf Heidenreich (1769-1826), was giving hospitality to priests and religious exiled from France. Adolf held the family title of "Erbdroste," which he in turn passed on to his son, Maximilian Ludwig (1794-1849), Maria's grandfather. Maximilian Ludwig's eldest son was Clement Heidenreich (1832-1923), father of our Beata.

Born on the 14th of August, 1832, Clement's religious and political formation took place in a climate intense with the struggle for the defense of the rights of Catholics. This, in turn, caused his entire life to be characterized by fidelity to the Church. This wealthy "Erbdroste" gave a third of his possessions for the construction and maintenance of a hospital. In 1879 he became deputy of the Center Party at the Reichstag in Berlin, and supported Louis Windhorst, head of the Center Party, in the struggle against Bismarck. He received papal honors from Leo XIII and from Pius X, and in 1923 when he died at the age of ninety, Pius XI personally celebrated a Mass for his soul.<sup>2</sup>

In 1858, Clement had married the Baroness Helen von Galen (1837-1917). Her family, too, was of the ancient Westphalian aristocracy and had in the middle of the seventeenth century produced the well-known Bishop Christopher Bernard von Galen of Munster, who allied himself with Louis XIV against the Dutch.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the imprisonment of Archbishop Gaspard Maximilian Droste zu Vischering, William Emmanuel (1811-1877), Baron of Ketteler and Helen's uncle, had in protest renounced a civil career. He entered the seminary and became a priest and

later bishop of Mainz. After the Kulturkampf he upheld the freedom of the Church in his vigorous sermons and in his other pastoral activities.

The Baroness' brother, Maximilian (1832-1903) was Auxiliary Bishop of Munster, and their nephew, Maximilian August von Galen (1878-1946) would later become bishop and cardinal of Munster. In the summer of 1941 Bishop von Galen spoke out clearly against the atrocities of the Gestapo and against the entire Hitler regime.<sup>4</sup>

Helen von Galen was a cultured woman of superior intelligence, capable of discussing history, sociology, philosophy, and art, but above all she was a woman of extraordinary piety, faith, and asceticism. Educated by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Blummental, she had assimilated a deep devotion to the Heart of Jesus, a devotion which she later transmitted to her husband, her children, and to all her dependents. In Count Clement's notes we read:

"Devotion to the Heart of Jesus was profoundly rooted in her soul right from the beginning of her stay at Blummental and was the source of her own prayer life and that of her loved ones. She introduced it not only into our chapel and home at Darfeld, but also into the parish of Darfeld."<sup>5</sup>

In the marriage of Count Clement Droste zu Vischering to the Baroness Helen von Galen the Lord prepared a setting for her who was to be the beloved apostle of His Heart.

### *Darfeld Castle*

The saints are first, children of nature and secondly, of grace. To understand the psychological climate of the Droste family, it is necessary to know the setting of the home in which Maria passed twenty-five years. The castle of Darfeld, situated in the most

beautiful part of the district of Munster, had been the property of the Droste zu Vischering family from the seventeenth century.

"With its walls, its lakes in which are reflected marvelous trees, with its towers, its little church which seems to emerge from the waters, with its drawbridge and its entrance rising above it is truly an imposing structure. . . Just in front of the principal facade there is a body of water bordered by beautiful shrubbery. On the door of the entrance is the inscription, 'In Thee, Lord, I have hoped; let me never be confounded.' From a nearby hill one has a panorama of the whole low countryside of Renania. The view is such, that a relative of the Beata, arriving in Darfeld after a trip to Naples, exclaimed, 'Naples, yes, Naples is very lovely, but I prefer the panorama at Darfeld.'"<sup>6</sup>

Even though Darfeld Castle was the most precious possession and the normal residence of the Drostes, there had been an uninterrupted family tradition that every child should be born in the sumptuous family building in Munster called the "Erbdrostenhof." And so it was there, in September, 1863, that the Count and Countess awaited the birth of their third child. Augusta, born in 1859, had been followed by a little boy who died when seven months of age. This time the parents hoped for another boy and had selected the name Maximilian or Max.

At dawn on September 8th, feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Count Clement was touring his property on horseback. On his return he planned to take his wife on pilgrimage to the nearby Marian shrine at Telgt, where they had gone many times. However, before reaching the house, one of the servants told him that the Countess was in labor and a doctor was needed urgently. The doctor arrived just in time to deliver little Max and place him in the crib prepared for him. But another crib was needed, because Max was followed by a little sister. The twins were frail, so the doctor, head of the Masons of Munster, knowing the faith of the Droste family, immediately baptized the twins. The baby girl was named Maria because she had been born on a

Marian feast.

Countess Helen experienced an unusual joy at this moment, but for the present did not disclose her impression. In 1896 she confided the secret to her daughter and to Pope Leo XIII on May 18, 1899. "At the birth of these two little ones I had a very deep, intimate joy which I realized was not natural. I have never experienced anything like it. Surely God has some special design on one of these babies, but-on which one?"<sup>7</sup>

Two days later, on September 10, solemn baptism was administered to the twins by their uncle, Msgr. Maximilian von Galen, canon of the cathedral. To the little girl were given the names Maria Joan Frances Teresa Antonia Umberta.

Thirty-six years later, in the brief autobiography written under orders of her spiritual director, Maria would recall:

"I was born September 8, 1863, in Munster, I and my twin brother Max. My mother later said that she felt such a great consolation on that day that it was the happiest day of her life. She added that this was not a natural consolation, one that a mother feels at the birth of a son or daughter, but that it was somehow different. My mother told me this when she came to Oporto in 1896.

Because I had been in danger of death, I received from our Lord the favor of being baptized immediately by the doctor, who was head of the Masons in Munster. In this way our Lord desired, at the first instant of my entrance into this world, to release me from the power of the devil and to take possession of me Himself. Ah, may He always be the Lord of my heart right up to the last moment of my life and for all eternity! Have I ever banished Him from my heart by sin? Your Reverence knows the answer to that better than I. If the Lord has not withdrawn Himself from me, it is only because of His great mercy."<sup>8</sup>

The Droste zu Vischerings had, after the birth of the twins,

seven more children-eleven in all, seven girls and four boys. Two brothers and one sister died in infancy.<sup>9</sup>

### *Her first years*

Thanks to documentation preserved in the archives of the Droste family in the form of personal notes of Count Clement and of observations and jottings of Maria's teachers, it is not difficult to reconstruct her first fifteen years. Her autobiography likewise is rich in dates and events.

For her first four years little Maria was confided to the care of an elderly lady, the same who served as nurse for the first years of each of the children.

"Eliza Duffel, an elderly domestic of our family, had the privilege of carrying Maria to the baptismal font for her solemn baptism. Later on she was to be very happy to have been able to care for Maria during these first four years of her life."<sup>10</sup>

When they were about five, Maria and Max were confided to a French teacher, a Miss Demazeau, so that they could learn French along with their normal education. Miss Demazeau recalled:

"Max and Maria were inseparable. It was delightful to see them together. If one would cry, the other would cry also. Maria, however, exercised a decided influence on her brother, sometimes to the point of being abusive. She was less meek than he, more lively, certainly more boyish, and she had the conviction that she must protect her brother. Once when Count Droste was correcting Max, Maria hid under the table and scratched the high shoes of her father with her little nails to get him to stop scolding Max."

The teacher writes again:



"Who of those with whom she played her brothers, sisters, cousins has not received some of those little scratches of Maria?"

As a consequence the child was nicknamed "Little Kitten," a name which "took." Maria's letters were often signed in this way, and "my little kitten" was the pet name used by her father for her.

Another note from Miss Demazeau explains further Maria's personality:

"I have never found a child so vivacious and teasing, but at the same time with such a large heart, simple, open, loyal and very obedient."<sup>11</sup>

Memories from childhood often remain indelibly impressed. Maria recounts in her autobiography a pilgrimage which her parents made to Rome on the occasion of the eighteenth centenary of the death of Saint Peter.

"Our Lord, who later inspired me to desire to suffer for the conversion of sinners and for the poor of holy Church, permitted also that from my very tender years I would taste the joy of being a daughter of the Church. One of my very first memories is that of a journey which my parents made to Rome in June of 1867. I remember the letters that they wrote us from there; the pictures of the Holy Father which they brought us, the celebration we had on the day of their return."<sup>12</sup>

The death of one of her little brothers was an occasion which also gives a glimpse of the formation of Maria's character, as well as of the work of grace within her. She wrote:

"When for the first time I found myself in the face of death, I saw it in terms of peace and consolation. In March of 1870 my nine month old brother died. I remember the

Christian resignation of my parents and the comfort all felt at having a little one in Heaven. Death, therefore seemed to me a means of uniting ourselves with our Lord, and even today I do not feel any differently about it. Yes, in this also I see how tender and faithful is our Lord."<sup>13</sup>

### *A forecast*

When Maria was only eight and had learned to read and write, she received a letter from her uncle, Monsignor Maximilian von Galen, who had given her solemn baptism. The letter is in answer to one from Maria written in French and forecasts what the little niece would become.

"Dear Maria. Your letter gave me great joy and I am really surprised by your writing. The 'm's' and 'n's' have beautiful stems, are straight and remain on the line, and this is a real pleasure to read. So, thought I, if little Maria of Darfeld will plant her small feet firmly right where her mother and father want her, as she has in writing this letter on paper, our Lady will have great joy in Heaven. I hope that each evening you may say to your guardian angel, 'Today, Maria has been very gentle and studious.' Then our Lady will ask the Lord for some gift for little Maria of Darfeld. The Lord will take a ray of love from His Divine Heart and give it to His Mother so that she can put it in your little heart.

In the beginning this will be in your little heart as a tiny flame, like the night lamp in your mother's bedroom. But your angel desires that the little flame of love of God burn lively, that the fire burn always until your little heart is all aflame with love for Jesus. And then what will happen? The Lord will come and He will be with you and will say, 'Dear Maria, since you have prepared such a warm place for Me in your heart, you will have a like place in My Heart.' This will be a great joy for you.

God bless you, dear child. My greetings to your parents, to your brothers and your sisters from your old Uncle Max."<sup>14</sup>

*That God might take her. . .*

Maria needed continual encouragement in order to moderate her character. Although very often she pleased her parents, she needed to regulate her impulsiveness. At this period, hours were devoted daily to school lessons by Augusta, Maria, and Max. Miss Demazeau was aided by an English teacher as well as by teachers for Latin, music, and history. Even the mother had her turn and taught the children sacred history and catechism. The girls also learned sewing and dressmaking. But Maria could not apply herself completely for an entire hour.

When she was ten, Maria was a singularly attractive child. Miss Demazeau noted:

"A smiling face, blue eyes which sometimes darkened fleetingly, very gentle gestures. She was enchanting as she came into a room on tiptoe, light as a feather, always ready for a dance around the table. Everything about her was gracious, to a point of causing some apprehension in her mother. One night while her mother was bending over her little bed contemplating her beauty in sleep, she said to me, 'If this little one should become too vain, it would be much better if the Lord took her.' "

Miss Demazeau continues:

"She received more than one scolding because of her wilfulness, which at times was uncontrollable, and for her vivaciousness. We would see her rolling on the wet ground, jumping on the grass, hiding behind bushes, and spoiling her clothes in such a way that her governess had to scold her and complained that she often had to change her from head to foot. But she also had a great heart. When we would go out in the carriage, she was preoccupied about my comfort, asking if I were cold. Then she would be delighted if she could help me by taking from her purse a small scarf which she would put on me. She

also gave me presents purchased with her little coins, which I would force myself to accept."<sup>15</sup>

It would seem that the teacher did not penetrate inside Maria's soul to know the latent gifts and spiritual dispositions which were there hidden. But the old uncle, Bishop William Emmanuel de Ketteler, who used to call her his "little devil," realized his niece had hidden gifts and talents which should be directed spiritually.

### *Vatican Council I and the Kulturkampf*

In 1869 Count Droste again went to Rome. As a papal chamberlain he had been called to welcome the bishops participating in Vatican Council I. In 1870, however, he had to return to his own country because the Council was suspended by the voluntary imprisonment of Pope Pius IX after the events surrounding the unification of Italy. The Kulturkampf followed in Germany. Maria, although still a child, was strongly affected by these events both in her attitude toward the Church and in the formation of her character. The Count noted:

"The Kulturkampf had, I believe, a great influence upon Maria, not only with regard to her religion but also in the formation of her character."

In her autobiography she wrote later:

"My father's journey to Rome and the Kulturkampf in 1872 continued to deepen my veneration for the Church. The Fathers of the Society of Jesus and the greater number of religious orders which I knew and admired were exiled. The bishop was arrested and exiled, receiving many marks of affection and veneration from the faithful of his diocese when he departed. Many parishes were without parish priests. All these sad events only deepened my esteem for holy Church and for her ministers. The bishop of Munster, before leaving for exile, ordered public

prayers and, in a solemn ceremony in the cathedral, consecrated his diocese to the Heart of Jesus."<sup>16</sup>

### *A new chapel*

In 1870 in order to preserve the memory of the infant son who had died earlier that year, Count Droste decided to build a new chapel near Darfeld castle. He intended to offer the Lord a more worthy dwelling and to center there his family prayer life. Maria attributed her religious vocation to this generous decision of her parents. She writes:

"In the year 1870 they began to build the new chapel. On account of the war the work was very slow, and the consecration did not take place until 1873. The Bishop of Munster and the Bishop of Mainz, uncle of my mother, were present. The consecration took place on the 5th of August. I note this date because it is memorable for several reasons... With great zeal my parents prepared this dwelling for the Lord, as the old chapel was not at all appropriate. Our Lord has deigned to recompense them by choosing me for His spouse and His tabernacle.

"This chapel has always been the center of our family life, and as soon as we were able to do so, the office of sacristan was confided by my mother first to my sister Augusta, may she rest in peace, and then to me. In this chapel and in the parish church I received many graces from the Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament."<sup>17</sup>

Maria affirmed that the Lord had chosen her for "His tabernacle." This image goes back to the sermon preached the day of the consecration of the new family chapel. Bishop Ketteler then developed the theme, "Behold the tabernacle of God with men." (Rev. 21/3). Augusta was later to say that she remembered this as the most moving sermon she had ever heard her uncle preach. The Count and Countess desired to immortalize the theme, and so had the altar inscribed: "Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and He shall dwell with them."

The new chapel was dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua but that did not prevent the central image from being the statue of the Sacred Heart. This chapel was to be the first place in the diocese of Munster for the devotion of the 'First Fridays.' Before the Bishop extended the practice of publicly honoring the Heart of Christ on the first Friday of each month, he allowed it in the chapel of the Droste family.<sup>18</sup>

### *First Communion and Confirmation*

The year 1875 was for Maria an eventful and an emotional year. She made her first confession January 29, received her first Communion on April 25, and was confirmed on July 8. Woven between these happenings was her own father's lively witness to his convictions while the religious persecution of the Prussian government raged.

During the months before her first Communion, Maria made little notes about her anticipation. Among these:

"Finally Max and I can be happy, seeing the day of our first Communion. This great day is approaching, in fact it is already here. I can't describe this moment. I am so happy, and the joy is indescribable."<sup>19</sup>

In her autobiography twenty-four years later Maria tells more of what passed within her at that time:

"I made my first Communion the 25th of April, 1875, in the parish church of Darfeld, together with my brother Max, with whom I did everything. Already at this time I desired to become a religious in order to belong entirely to our Lord. Having heard that some saints had felt an invitation to religious life on the day of their first Communion, I myself was expecting this same grace. But it was not granted me. I then began to wait anxiously for my Confirmation, which I received the 8th of July the same year. Immediately after my Confirmation a religious vocation was born in my soul,

and I have never lost it. In fact it has always grown stronger."<sup>20</sup>

Because of the persecution, her first Communion did not have the solemnity it would otherwise have had. On March 18, Bishop Brinkman of Munster had been sentenced to prison. The Count, when he learned of this arrest, hurried to the bishop's house to protest the government's decision. Nevertheless, the bishop was taken forcibly and pushed into a prison van. The intrepid Count walked beside the van as a guard of honor for his bishop. When stopped by a police officer, he courageously said, "I am the Erbdroste of Munster. I must follow my prince." He was restrained, and the carriage drove away. The Count was able to vindicate this experience six months later when the bishop was freed. He then went to the prison and accompanied Bishop Brinkman back to his residence.<sup>21</sup> Maria's first Communion took place during the bishop's imprisonment.

A more joyous circumstance surrounding the day was her reception of a small but significant gift. Archbishop Leudochowski of Poznan, which was in a section of Poland under Prussian domination, had also been imprisoned because of his resistance. He knew the twins' great uncle, bishop of Mainz, and from his prison sent the little communicants a small gold cross and a picture of our Lady.<sup>22</sup>

Countess Helen was at the twins' side, not for the touches of festivity which usually accompany a first Communion in a family, but for spiritual support. Maria recalled this fourteen years later in 1899 in a letter to her brother:

"I still remember the evening of that day of our first Communion. Mother comforted us because we were sad and were regretting that the day had passed so quickly. She assured us that the day of our first Communion never ends because our Lord will remain with us always."<sup>23</sup>

For her Confirmation Maria received a letter from her great

uncle, Bishop Ketteler:

"My dear little plant. I wish you and Max happiness and blessing on this day of your Confirmation. This is a year full of grace for you, my dear child. May these graces find in you good ground and bear for the rest of your life abundant fruit for Heaven. From now on you must put forth every effort to make your own the virtues of the Child Jesus. You will then be very pleasing to God, for in Confirmation you receive the Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude. All depends on your cooperation. I bless you."<sup>24</sup>

The rest of her life demonstrated how generous was Maria's cooperation with the sacramental grace of Confirmation.

### *Small but arduous victories*

In her autobiography after recalling her first Communion and Confirmation, Maria adds:

"In the years which followed, nothing extraordinary happened to me. I jealously held onto my resolve to be a religious without however making any effort to become better. The period between twelve and sixteen years of age was the period in which I offended our Lord the most. However, He never abandoned me and always treated me so mercifully. What I best remember during this interval are the feasts in the church and the chapel, and the innocent games I played with my brothers. Then I seemed to be more of a boy than a girl, and I believe there was not another person in the world happier than I was."<sup>25</sup>

Her belief that between twelve and sixteen years of age she "most offended our Lord" is offset by the witness of her contemporaries and documentation from the archives of the Droste family. These unanimously confirm that the 'sins' of Maria against the Lord were a quite ordinary acting-out of a very determined and lively temperament.



A picture of Maria is given by her sister Anna, who was three years younger:

"When we would fuss among ourselves, she would take a leading part and always wanted to have the best of the argument. She was rather overbearing. Because of her impulsive nature, her judgment was not always too balanced. Nevertheless she really practiced the corporal works of mercy, and she knew nothing really bad. . . "26

The judgment of her brother William is similar:

"During her youth she had a strong will and she never gave in. Immediately after, however, she would be all right."27

Testimonies from her family show that Maria became gradually more amiable. Later, much of the 'extraordinary' occurred in her life, and it is precisely her strong character which removes from these occurrences any suspicion of auto-suggestion. Her natural temperament attests to the fact that she had to struggle to overcome her weaknesses of character, to develop the positive gifts she had received, and to allow these gifts to grow until she reached the point where she could determine each day to become more pleasing to God. Maria became a model of small but very difficult victories. And in this respect she has something to teach youth who desire to become more Christ-like.

Perhaps more than anyone else, her own mother succeeded in penetrating the psychology of her impulsive yet gifted daughter:

"She wanted to be right about everything and could not accept the tiniest opposition. She would become annoyed when faced with the least obstacle to what she wanted. With her brothers she was always the superior. It was not easy to control her. Often she let her disappointment be

obvious, and was not inclined to change her mind. Sometimes J had to correct her for her excesses of anger. Being very impulsive, she did not have sufficient patience to control her first reactions."

This is a negative picture, but the mother also saw the positive:

"She was absolutely sincere, so loyal that I believe she never once told a lie. It is true she had a strong temper but she could also be very cordial and full of goodness."<sup>28</sup>

*November 21, 1878*

November 21, feast of the Presentation of the Virgin in the temple, recurs as a significant day in Maria's life. Before this feast in the year 1878, she had already experienced in her heart, on the day of her Confirmation, the grace of a religious vocation, but she had kept this a secret. Three years followed with nothing extraordinary occurring, yet these were years filled with events which might have distracted her from the urge she had felt. For example, in 1876 she had accompanied her parents to Paris to visit her sister Augusta, who was a student with the Visitation Sisters there.

In 1877 her parents took her elder sister on a trip to Rome while Maria remained in Darfeld to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. There are two letters extant which Maria wrote her parents while they were in Rome on this particular visit, and in which she reassures them. In one she says:

"My dear, dear Mamma. I come again to promise you that during all the time you are gone I will be very good, especially good in taking care of my brothers and my little sisters."<sup>29</sup>

In August of that same year, 1877, she and her younger sister Anna went with their mother to Karlsbad in Bohemia where the

Countess received treatment at the sulfur springs. That autumn, Maria suffered a separation from her brothers Max and William, for the Count wanted his sons to attend the Jesuit school at Feldkirk in the Tyrol. This community of Jesuits had been expelled from Germany during the Kulturkampf.

All during the year 1878 she remained at Darfeld Castle, absorbed in her education and keeping hidden her desires for her future. In the little chapel at the castle as well as in the parish church, religious feasts were celebrated with solemnity, and so came November 21, 1878. Maria was fifteen.

"On November 21, 1878, I was present during a sermon preached by the parish priest of Darfeld. I was in very good dispositions because the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin had always brought me special joy. This was, is it were, my very own feast, a day on which my parents usually showed me special tenderness. As a child I had felt that this day was mine and that it was a privileged day on which I could hope for everything from our Lord. I experienced great joy in uniting myself to the sacrifice of our Lady at such a tender age.

"The above mentioned sermon had as theme : 'You will love the Lord your God with all your heart.' . . . The preacher explained quite well our obligation to give all our heart to God, not only a part of our heart but our whole heart. I immediately reflected, 'I must become a religious.' However I also reflected that my parents, who are the most pious and God-fearing people I have ever known, did not close themselves up in a convent. Instead they had married, dividing their hearts between themselves and God. Yet, I could not resist the grace, for as much as I tried to close the ears of my soul, telling myself that the sermon was being heard by many more people than me and almost none of them were thinking of closing themselves up in a convent, it was not possible for me to resist the voice of God.

"That day was decisive for me. I should perhaps say that God began that day to draw me to Himself in a very special manner, making me know ever more and more that He wanted me all for Himself. From then on I began to exact more of myself, I began to control myself, I began to detach myself from creatures and to be happy in loving Jesus. Little by little grace became stronger, allowing a battle to take place. On one side our Lord was asking for my heart; on the other side I, myself, tried to divide my love between creatures and God. No one, however, suspected what was happening in me because I remained as before enthusiastic about my play, about jumping, about singing, about riding with my parents and with my brothers."<sup>30</sup>

### *At school in Riedenburg*

In the spring of 1879 Maria, too, was sent to a boarding school. Her mother had wanted her to attend her school, that directed by the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Blumental. but it had been suppressed due to the political situation in Germany. So, the Drostes looked toward another school of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, one on the Lake of Constance in Austria, at Riedenburg.

Two years earlier Maria had suffered separation from her brothers when they were sent to school at Feldkirk; this time her sacrifice was even greater as she was the one to leave her loved castle, her parents, and her sisters. However, Maria's years at Riedenburg caused devotion to the Heart of Christ, a devotion cherished there, to deepen within her. Also, during these two years at school she worked assiduously at controlling her impulsiveness.

There is abundant correspondence between parents and daughter from this period. The Drostes greatly felt the separation, but believed it necessary in order to better form her personality. The family has preserved Maria's yearly scholastic and conduct reports. The Countess wrote her daughter:

"You have given us great pleasure by the scholastic report we have received. I have sent it to your father in Berlin, and he will be very happy because it is truly beautiful. May the Lord reward you for the joy you have given us."

The conduct report was different however. The superior of the community remarked in a letter to the Countess:

"Her character is truly just as you described it to me. It is difficult for her to adapt herself to the discipline of the school. Maria judges everything according to her own standards and does not take much account of her companions. However, a slight improvement is beginning to be seen."

The mother was clear when she wrote Maria:

"The letters we have received are not completely satisfactory. We had hoped that the discipline at school would lead you to succeed in controlling yourself more and that you would not let yourself go so completely as at home."<sup>31</sup>

But what was not evident to the teachers nor to the mother was the sacrifice Maria was making in renouncing her wilfulness. She recalled this process in 1899 in her autobiography:

"The two and a half years I passed in school were for me years of grace. I did not hear any teaching or advice different from what I had already heard from my parents; but the example of the religious and the atmosphere of the school impressed me. This was the house of the Heart of Jesus. Everything good came to me from that Source. I learned to control my character because I began to understand that to love the Heart of Jesus without having a spirit of sacrifice is only sentiment. I began to love and to look for sacrifices in order to unite myself only to Him."<sup>32</sup>

### *A paternal blessing*

Maria had left home April 18, 1879. A letter written her by the Count around this time is noteworthy, not only for the encouragement her father gave her, but also for a special blessing he sent her. The Count was required to reside in Berlin because of his membership in parliament, but this did not deter him from the care of his family with that spiritual influence which characterized him. The letter quoted below is apparently the first letter written Maria by her father after her arrival in Riedenburg.

"My dear little child. Yesterday I had the joy of receiving your letter. Thanks be to God because you have been so sensible in accepting your detachment from us, from your brothers and your sisters. We are not here on earth simply to enjoy life but also to work and to suffer. Earth is a valley of tears; only in Heaven will there be rest and a perfectly happy life. We must therefore accept detachment because, according to God's will, it can serve our temporal and eternal good. Let us accept it in the best manner. We missed you a great deal during our trip back to Darfeld. Let us hope that in about fifteen days you will be able to see your brothers again. They write regularly as usual.

"I returned to parliament Monday morning. I would like to be with you but I, like you, must work and struggle. I am very happy to know that you like being in class. I exhort you very much to try to remain straight when you are sitting. I recommend you in fact to sit straight and not to slouch like you used to do.

"Goodbye, my dear and good child. May the Divine Heart protect you.

"With all my affection, your father."<sup>33</sup>

In religion, Maria will be called Maria of the Divine Heart. Only God knows the relationship between this paternal blessing of

May 14, 1879, and the events which followed.

*November 21, 1880*

A year and a half later, again on the feast of the Presentation of Mary, Maria made a definitive decision. This time the Lord spoke to her heart through a Jesuit priest, Father Melchior Hauser. Father Hauser knew the Droste family, as he resided at the Feldkirk school attended by Max and William. This priest was to influence Maria's spiritual growth. She writes:

"On November 21, 1880, I assisted at a religious investiture ceremony at the school. A priest of the Company of Jesus, an apostle of the Sacred Heart, gave the sermon. For the very first time I heard these words, 'Listen, daughter, and lend your ear. Forget your people and the house of your father because the King is enamored of your beauty.'

"I cannot express what passed within me. I saw my whole life there outlined. I heard the voice of the Lord calling me, exhorting me to forget creatures, my country, my parents, my brothers and sisters whom I loved greatly and tenderly. He lowered Himself to ask me to be His spouse. 'The King is enamored of your beauty.' These words touched me to the heart. It was He who said them to me. I did not belong any more to myself but I was all, all, all His. O! Jesus! Only You know what passed between us two. You are mine; I am Yours.

"At the end of this ceremony the priest sent for me. He knew my parents but I had not seen him before. After a certain initial repugnance, I began to confide to him what had passed in my soul. This was the first time that I had disclosed my secret, but I did it with joy. He immediately recognized my vocation and encouraged me."<sup>34</sup>

## *The joys of His Heart*

After that meeting, Father Hauser did not forget the secret which Maria had confided to him. He understood that God was working something extraordinary in her soul. But, however much he was moved by her confidences, he limited himself to urging upon her a love of sacrifice and a humble submission to her parents and other superiors. Maria continues:

"When this priest came back to school on March 25, 1881, matters were at such a point that he advised me to speak to the superior and to my mother during the Easter holidays. When I remember the graces of that time I am really abashed. Our Lord opened to me still more the secrets of His Heart. During Communion or Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament He would fill me with consolation.

"I remember in particular the feasts of the Sacred Heart in 1880 and 1881. What Communions! My heart was moved meditating on the words of our Lord to His disciples, 'Remain in my love.' The Heart of Jesus invited me to remain in Him and not to give my heart to others. And I already experienced that peace, that happiness, that joy of Heaven which is hidden in His Divine Heart and in union with Him.

"I am not a poet, but when the love of our Lord was burning strongest I composed a few verses. . . It was in 1880 or 1881. I remember that they finished thus, 'Let me die in Your Heart and let me be Yours forever. Oh, yes! dead to the world, to myself, to live in the Heart of Jesus and one day die in Him in order to possess Him in Heaven and live with Him for all eternity.' These were my most ardent desires."<sup>35</sup>

## *Child of Mary*

The years at school in Riedenburg include a date which Maria



underlines in her autobiographical notes.

A total donation and consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the dominant characteristic of the spirituality of our Beata. She was spouse, victim, apostle of the Heart of Jesus. One might be tempted to think therefore that Maria, eminently Christocentric as she was, gave only a nominal place to devotion to our Lady and imitation of the saints. On the contrary, it is apparent that her mystical union with Jesus developed parallel with a veneration of Mary. The most important dates of her gift of self to the Lord are Marian feasts, and among them that of the Presentation of Mary predominates; it was the feast of the consecration of our Lady to God. In the story of Maria Droste we can grasp not so much the importance but the necessity of Mary in the mystery of salvation. From her and for her the Word was made flesh, and it is as Man that Christ gives Himself even in the union which characterizes the contemplative life. In the relationship of the soul with the God-Man, Mary is there too. Maria Droste's spirituality cannot be fully understood without perceiving in her way to the Heart of Christ, the presence, in fact the *mediation* of Mary.

"On the 8th of December, 1880, I was admitted to the Society of the Children of Mary . . . Our Lady has always been for me a very attentive mother. The most memorable dates of my life, all or almost all of them, coincide with her feasts."<sup>36</sup>

### *Goodbye to Riedenburg*

Maria was visited by her parents at Easter, 1881. Following Father Hauser's advice, but not without hesitation and interior struggle, she confided to her mother what was going on in her soul and her desires to become a religious. The Countess counselled her to take time to reflect, and suggested that she keep her decision secret from the other members of the family.

By summer she had completed a segment of studies and

could leave the school. She would have liked to remain another year but her health was an obstacle. A lung complication presented itself during the winter of 1880-81. This same lung condition was also the reason why the superior of the boarding school, who knew Maria wanted to become a religious, decided against her eventually becoming a Religious of the Sacred Heart. It was thought she would have been unable to carry on an apostolate of teaching. However, Maria Droste did not feel particularly attracted to this order as she was drawn towards the poor. In her notes of this time we read:

"I wanted to be poor and forgotten with Jesus poor and suffering. I felt myself drawn towards an order whose end was to take care of the sick or to teach children of very modest conditions."<sup>37</sup>

So it was that, just as two years earlier she had wept when leaving Darfeld for Riedenburg, now in July of 1881 she wept in saying goodbye to the place where her vocation had matured and where her life of total consecration to the Heart of Jesus had been outlined for her. She was now returning to her castle, apparently the same vivacious Maria as two years before, with the personality her family knew so well, but she was profoundly changed in culture, in gentleness, in her relations with others. And above all, she had the treasured secret of her religious vocation deep in her heart.

### *Entrance into society*

In September, 1881, when she became 18, Maria made her 'debut' into society. While guarding in her heart her spiritual attractions, she entered into all aspects of her family life. Again we see that she cannot be accused of auto-suggestion or hysteria; she was too alive, too grounded in the world around her.

When she returned to Darfeld from school, no one suspected her intention of entering the convent. In appearance she was

lively and attractive to a noticeable degree, an object of attention from those she met, including the family servants and workers on the estate. The latter were enchanted, by her riding ability. None of her brothers, not even her father could handle a horse as she did. She was termed a "born rider." Her letters and those of her family from this period are filled with accounts of trips, of long walks, and of rides.<sup>38</sup>

January, 1882, found her in Berlin at the Reichstag, observing the famous vote which abrogated the law of May 8, 1874, by which bishops, priests, and religious had been exiled. On this occasion, Louis Windthorst, head of the Christian Center party, introduced a motion for the immediate return to the fatherland of the exiled members of the clergy. This received a 2/3 vote of the Reichstag. Here are some of Maria's impressions from a letter she wrote on January 15:

"We assisted at the entire debate on Windthorst's proposed law, but we did not see Bismarck. Wednesday, we were guests of Prince Radzwill. Thursday, we attended a dinner for all the members of the parliament belonging to the Center party. Friday, Windthorst, Schorlemer, and the Bruhls were our guests..."<sup>39</sup>

Later she recalled:

"Impressions which caused me to be more closely united to the Church were not wanting. Twice we visited the bishop of Munster in his exile in Holland, and we had the privilege of receiving Holy Communion from the hands of this great defender of the faith."<sup>40</sup>

*Retreat at Munster-Max, 1882*

Maria's autobiography provides an account of this retreat:

"In the month of May, 1882, I made a retreat at Munster. Before beginning, I wrote Father Hauser for

advice concerning my vocation. He answered me that our Lord was indeed calling me but that I could also save myself even if I did not answer His call. For me, this response was sufficient to calm me because all I wanted to know was whether our Lord was really calling me to the convent.

"I only wanted to answer God's invitation; I really was not thinking of gaining Heaven by entering the convent. What I wanted was to belong only to Him, to love Him, to glorify Him, and to be a victim of love without attaching importance to any recompense. This has always been the goal I have had before my eyes. I never had another. Yet, I had no merit for this because it was our Lord Himself who drew me in this way.

"In the meantime the desire to consecrate myself to Him by a vow of virginity grew immensely. 'Jesus, purity of virgins' was my favorite ejaculation at this time, while He Himself made me taste the sweetness of His love. I thought, if the desires in my heart to love Jesus are already a sea of joy, what must the reality be? This knowledge was reserved for me for later."<sup>41</sup>

### *Her father's consent*

The 5th of August, 1882, brought great rejoicing to the castle of Darfeld. Count and Countess Droste zu Vischering had been married twenty-five years. It was an intimate, family feast because it had been decided to have the solemn celebration of the anniversary on August 15. For that, the mayor would be present and a concert would follow the solemn Mass offered by Bishop von Galen.<sup>42</sup>

One might wonder why Maria chose the 5th of August to reveal to her parents her desire to become a religious, but choose it she did. It was a Marian feast, that of the dedication of the Roman basilica of St. Mary Major.

"On August 5, 1882, I told my parents of my definitive resolution to become a religious. They were full of joy, for they heartily desired that one of their daughters be consecrated to the Lord. However, because in my last year of school I had been a little sickly and it was feared I might have weak lungs, my father responded that I would have to wait until I was twenty-one years old."<sup>43</sup>

In a letter Maria adds:

"This sacrifice was very great, but I had already prayed much and sacrificed all for love."<sup>44</sup>

Her father, on his silver wedding day, took a piece of myrtle and graciously handed which had decorated the jubilee cake it to his 'little kitten.'

God, on His part accepted the desire of the parents to have a daughter a religious. In addition to Maria, two other daughters would consecrate themselves to God; Theresa, born in 1872, would become a Sister of St. Joseph of Chambery, and Elizabeth, born in 1883, a Religious of the Sacred Heart.<sup>45</sup>

### *In the glow of His Heart*

The year 1883, when Maria was twenty, was for her a year of grace. During this year she received the gift of a deeper knowledge of the cult of the Heart of Christ, of its nature, and of its integral relationship to expiation. Documentation from this period is characterized on one hand by two letters from Father Hauser which insist on obedience, on a spirit of prayer, on docility in aridity of spirit; and on the other hand by the auto-biographical notes in which Maria relates her first mystical experiences. These came to her during Eucharistic adoration.

In June the entire Droste family made a retreat together in preparation for the feast of the Sacred Heart, the day which the Count had selected for the consecration of his family to the Heart

of Jesus. On the Sunday during that retreat, while the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the family chapel, Maria had an extraordinary experience which was to become habitual:

"The chapel was decorated for the octave of St. Anthony and the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The image of His Heart, object of my affection right from my infancy, was surrounded with lights and flowers. It was quite near to the altar where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and my glance during adoration could embrace at the same time the Sacred Host in the ostensorium and this statue. It is necessary that I say this because, as I have already explained, I could never separate the Heart of Jesus from the Eucharist, where His Heart is truly present as part of the most precious and sacred Body of Jesus. The statue represented to my bodily eyes that which faith showed the eyes of my soul, while in my heart a flame of love burned.

"In this state I received Holy Communion, filled with His consolations. Then He said to me, not with a voice which one hears with one's corporal senses but with a voice which I did not know then but which today is very familiar to me, 'You will be the spouse of My Heart.'

"It is impossible to explain what I felt. I remained as if stunned, annihilated, confused, immersed in an ocean of love. What happy moments. . . Spouse of His Heart! How? When? I? I, so poor and miserable? Only You, Jesus, know what passed between us, and no one will ever be able to understand it, ever. With these words a veil was lifted from my future, even though I did not fully understand everything.

"I then wrote to my director to ask him if what had happened to me was only in my imagination or if it was from an excess of boldness on my part. I still remember his response: 'You will then become the spouse of Our Lord.'

How can you think this to be an illusion or boldness when He Himself has chosen you?"

"From then on I could not think of Christ except as my Spouse.

In. the past I had believed that Jesus not only as God but also as Man was present in us. Then later I had learned that this only happens during the presence of the Sacred Species after Holy Communion. That had caused me to feel sad and desolate. But after that memorable day (June, 1883) I complained of this to Him, and He in His infinite goodness understood my request and promised to remain always in my heart not only with His divinity but also with His humanity. How? I do not know. However, I have had the certainty of His presence in me.

"My sister wondered because I, although sickly and suffering, was always happy, even to the point of saying that in the whole world there was nobody happier than I was. But she did not know the reason for my happiness. The presence of Jesus made everything sweet for me, while for my part I desired suffering and pain because I thought that suffering was the only means by which I could die to myself and give Him a proof of my love for Him. From that time, suffering has never left me. It has increased little by little until I find myself today nailed to the cross with Him. With that feast of His Heart a new life began for me."<sup>46</sup>

After this, Father Hauser could no longer find reason for withholding permission for Maria to pronounce a vow of virginity, as she longed to do.

"On the 8th of December, 1883, with the permission of my director I made a vow of perpetual virginity. My desire was finally accomplished; I was the spouse of Jesus."<sup>47</sup>

Father Hauser wrote her:

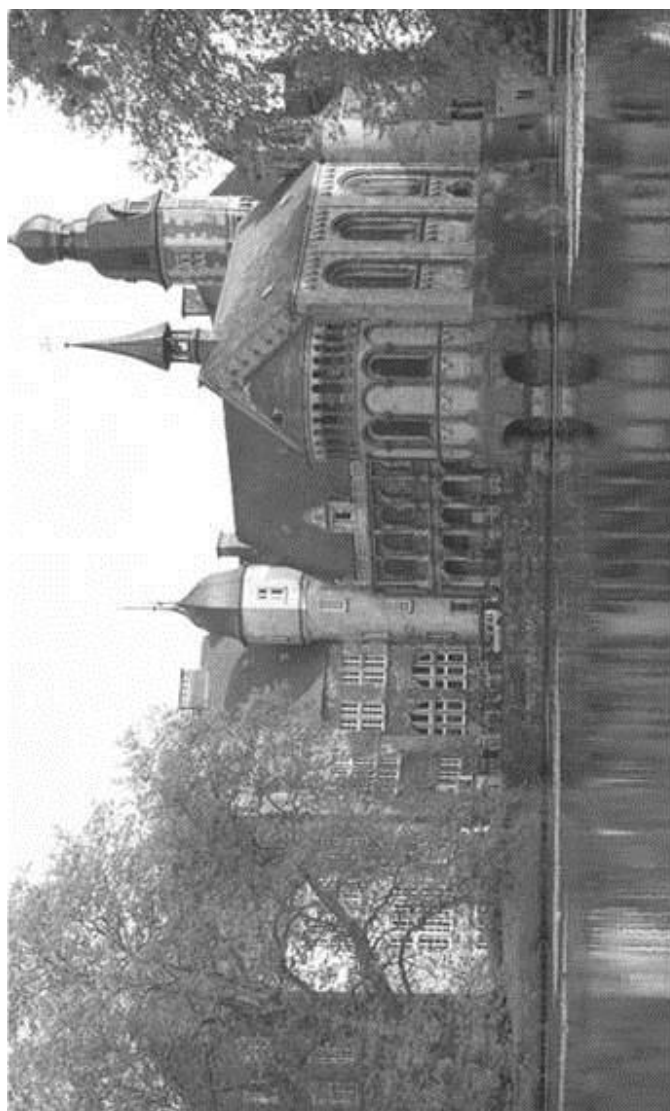
"You must be a great saint, not in extraordinary matters but by means of a continuous exercise of social virtues in your relations with others, and by the purity of your interior intentions."<sup>48</sup>

The following pages will show how Maria Droste zu Vischering practiced heroically the virtues recommended to her for improving her character which, according to her director, was "naturally egoistic and difficult."<sup>49</sup>





*Maria at 14 years of age*



Darfeld Castle

## Footnotes - CHAPTER I

1. Chasle, Abbe Louis. *Sister Mary of the Divine Heart*. London: Burns & Dates, Ltd., 1907. pp. 3-4.
2. Kerdreux, Michel de. *Comme Une Flamme*, Casterman: Editions Salvator, Mulhouse, 1968. p. 19.
3. Chasle, op. cit., p. 5.
4. C.f. Catholic Encyclopedia, Italian edition, 1950. Vol. V, column 1864.
5. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 17.
6. Ibid, p. 22.
7. C.f. page 216, It. edition.
8. *Autobiography* of Maria Droste zu Vischering. Unpublished, part of the Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 209 f.
9. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 62 f. The eight children who lived beyond infancy are:
  - Augusta - 1859 to 1897.
  - Max - 1863 to 1938.
  - Maria - 1863 to 1899.
  - William - 1865 to 1948.
  - Anna - 1866 to 1957.
  - Theresa - 1872 (no date of death available).
  - Antonia - 1875 to 1890.
  - Elisabeth - 1883 to 1955.
10. Kerdreux, op. cit. p. 14.
11. Ibid, p. 41.
12. *Autobiography*, p. 212.
13. *Autobiography*, p. 212 f.
14. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 26.
15. Ibid, p. 33.
16. *Autobiography*, p. 213.
17. *Autobiography*, p. 213 f.
18. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 32.
19. Ibid, p. 35.
20. *Autobiography*, p. 214.
21. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 35.
22. Chasle, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

23. Kerdreux. op. cit. p. 36.
24. Ibid, p. 37.
25. Autobiography p. 214 f.
26. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 67.
27. Ibid, p. 79.
28. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 51.
29. Ibid, p. 44.
30. Autobiography, p. 215.
31. Kerdreux, op. cit, p. 59.
32. Autobiography, p. 217.
33. Kerdreux, op. cit, p. 55.
34. Autobiography, p. 217 f.
35. Ibid, p. 218.
36. Ibid, p. 219.
37. Kerdreux, op cit. p. 69.
38. Ibid, p. 71-72.
39. Ibid, p. 73.
40. Autobiography, p. 219.
41. Ibid, p. 219.
42. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 74.
43. Autobiography, p. 220.
44. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 77.
45. Apostolic process of Breslavia, p. 3 f.
46. Autobiography, p. 221-2.
47. Ibid, p. 220.
48. Kerdreux, op. cit., p. 83.
49. Chasle, op. cit., p. 35.

## Chapter II

### IN THE ARMS OF PROVIDENCE (1883-1888)

Reliance on God alone, no matter what the specific social conditions and circumstances of a person's life, entrenches an individual in faith, hope, and love. This reliance can become heroic when a person is impeded by sickness from following an ideal. Ordinarily in such a situation, discouragement takes over followed by pessimism and distrust, to the extent of regretting and even resenting God's plan for the person's life.

Maria Droste zu Vischering, between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, had genuine signs of a religious vocation and yearned to enter a convent. Yet, health prevented her. Because she relied on God, she became more deeply rooted in faith, hope, and love. In his letter of November 1, 1883, previously quoted, Father Hauser had written her, "Don't be fearful, dear child, to abandon yourself entirely into the arms of Providence." Maria obeyed wholeheartedly.

This present chapter embraces the five years that Maria passed almost without interruption at the castle of Darfeld, abandoning herself to God, embracing what He asked, yet at the same time firmly trusting that the Lord would soon fulfill in a more visible way His promise, "You will be the spouse of My Heart."

#### *Missionary desires*

As we have seen, in 1875 when Maria received the sacrament of Confirmation she felt the grace of a vocation being born within her.

"I was very happy. I felt more like a boy than a girl and wanted to become a Jesuit in order to go to the African missions."<sup>1</sup>

This attraction towards the African missions had evolved from the acquaintance of her family with two Jesuits from Zambia. These two priests were frequent guests of the Drostes, from whom they received financial assistance.

In 1884 Maria again looked toward the missions, this time Denmark, which for German Catholics was a missionary area. Following the liberal Danish constitution of 1849, Catholic works had sprung up in Denmark and conversions resulted. By 1884 the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery were flourishing there, counting more than two hundred sisters distributed in various parts of the country.<sup>2</sup>

The apostolic prefect of Denmark often visited the Droste family when he came to Westphalia to collect funds. From him Maria learned about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery. All this drew her towards the Danish missions.

In the summer of 1884, accompanied by her family, she visited the Sisters of St. Joseph in Copenhagen and asked admission to their novitiate. She was accepted and arrangements completed for her entrance the following year.

However, once back in Darfeld, her lung weakness reasserted itself and caused so much concern that it was decided that her health would never permit her to live in the cold climate of Denmark. Contacts with the Sisters of St. Joseph continued, nevertheless, and they often encouraged her and prayed for her complete recovery.

This missionary attraction on the part of Maria may seem incongruous. How could she, so favored by God with mystical experiences, prefer an active apostolate and a missionary apostolate at that? Would not an enclosed monastery, totally given to the contemplative life, have been better suited to her?

Maria was not one to lose her head because of the extraordinary graces she received. Such gifts are distinct from

that of a vocation to a specific religious order, which is conditioned by individual personal aptitudes. In the future our Lord would gift her with even greater charisms, not in an enclosed monastery but, instead, in a center of prevention and rehabilitation where she would give herself to the care of the "wandering sheep." That Maria's purpose was fixed in this regard is characteristic of her.

Her maternal uncle, Monsignor Maximilian von Galen, in whom she confided, understood her desires. She wrote to him:

"On the one hand, I will never be able to enter a congregation where the contemplative life has not the first place. But at the same time I ask myself if I were to teach poor children and lead them to the Heart of Jesus, if I were to assist the sick and soften the sufferings of the dying, if I succeeded in bringing one poor sinner to conversion, would this not be pleasing to our Lord? I think that to pray always, to meditate always, to embroider always is not for me. I must do something more concrete. I believe that God is calling me to an order of active life. If God wants me to push a wheelbarrow, as you say, that is all the same for me. If this wheelbarrow takes me to Heaven, and if on it I find our Lord Jesus Christ, so much the better. I would be happy because of that; I would only rejoice the more."<sup>3</sup>

### *In the quiet of Darfeid*

The tenor of life of the Droste family during Maria's youth can be gleaned from the following portion of a letter written her by her father while she was in school at Riedenburg:

"We had a mission at the castle. When it ended all our family, including the servants, went to confession and this morning we all received Holy Communion. It is very consoling for me to tell you, my dear, that the entire household, everyone, is in the state of grace."<sup>4</sup>

Her missionary dream about Denmark having vanished, serene in her conviction that this was what God wanted, Maria resumed her usual family life. She alternated hours of prayer with her work in the home, deliberately reserving to herself and her sisters the cleaning and maintenance of the chapel.

"Our Lord became my Master. Especially at Communion and on days of solemn exposition He deigned to teach and console me. I do not know how to explain what the Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was for me. The days of Forty Hours Devotion and Holy Thursday were for me days of grace. Ah! If the parish church of Darfeld could tell all that passed between me and Him! What happy hours! I felt myself inflamed with divine love. It seemed to me that He made me go out of myself and rest in His Heart. I was no more myself; I was abyssed in Him. I drank with an unquenchable thirst from the torrents of His love, and to complete this so intimate union all that was wanting was that I die.

"I did all I could so that nobody would suspect what was passing within me. In those years I reflected often upon the revelations of the Sacred Heart to Bl. Margaret Mary Alcoque and on some extracts from her letters. I understood ever more that devotion to the Heart of Jesus is inseparable from suffering. I desired to suffer. I knew that my vocation was to suffer for Him and for love of Him in order to be united to Him. I prayed Him to let me suffer, and I suffered because I could not suffer enough. My favorite ejaculation at that time was, 'My Jesus, always more suffering, always more love!' I suffered a real martyrdom because of this thirst to suffer with which our Lord inspired me and which went on growing more intense."<sup>5</sup>

Comments of Michel Kerdreux, author of *Comme Une Flamme*. merit attention:



"Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, her contemporary, who also attained a high degree of love while still young, had felt in her heart a great desire to suffer. She had an intimate assurance that Jesus had reserved numerous crosses for her and that through these He would give her many souls, and that her desire to suffer would grow in the measure that sufferings increased. Spouses of a crucified God, both of them proved themselves heroically faithful in the midst of physical and moral trials, meriting to become co-redemptrices with the Saviour."<sup>6</sup>

In spite of her, mystical prayer, Maria remained the same at home:

"I did everything with my sisters, and only my parents, my brothers and a few relatives knew about my desires. The occupations I preferred above all else were to prepare the chapel, to embroider for the altar, to sew for the poor, and to visit the sick poor-because in these occupations I found Him."<sup>7</sup>

Around this time Maria took part in two dances during carnival season. In her autobiography she specifies that she "assisted" at them. She adds:

"But even at those parties I did not lose union with Him. Right in the midst of the gaiety I remembered Him and was conscious of His presence. It seemed to me that I was happiest of all those young girls because none of them had a Lover like mine."<sup>8</sup>

### *Vacillation*

Temptation is chameleon-like; it can assume unforeseen and unforeseeable forms. Days of trial for Maria would be many days when she endured cold, spiritual fatigue, ennui, atrocious spiritual and physical suffering. One such day occurred at this time of her life. We do not know the exact date but it can be placed

somewhere before 1886, between her twenty-first and twenty-third years. The experience proves that Maria did not always ride on the crest of the wave as does a water skier drawn by an outboard motor. Maria was being drawn by her Lord, but even so she might have lost her balance. She did not, thanks to her courage.

"I must confess with much sadness that later on my heart sometimes faltered. I experienced complacency in seeing that my peers, especially one, were attracted to me. My heart began to give in. I was tempted to loosen the bridle of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. He, however, did not leave me alone and instead gave me great courage to liberate my heart from excessive human affection."<sup>9</sup>

This admission does not need to be amplified. Maria knew well that the innumerable spiritual gifts she had received called for a response of total fidelity. She knew God was asking her to give all, to sacrifice everything for Him. Delicate souls have perceptions which can cause matters which would be imperceptible to others to seem gigantic to themselves.

### *Ready to offer her life*

During the spring of 1885, Max and William, accompanied by their teacher, journeyed to Rome. They participated in a solemn papal function, and were presented to Pope Leo XIII. While still in Rome, Max was stricken with a serious illness, apparently typhoid, and it was feared he might not survive. The news threw Darfeld into consternation. The Count and Countess rushed to his bedside while the rest of the family anxiously awaited news at home. Maria was so affected by Max's illness that she too became ill.

At this time a Jesuit priest, a Father Loffier, visited the castle. He had preached several retreats at Darfeld and was close to the family. The good man saw Maria and concluded she was in danger of death. Thinking to console her, he suggested that she

offer her life for that of Max. Maria at first hesitated. "No! I don't want to die, at least voluntarily, because I must be a religious." But her generosity of heart won out, and she offered her life for her brother's recovery.

"This cost me because I did not want to die before answering God's call. But with the grace of God I made the offering with all the generosity I could. And what joy and consolation I experienced afterwards! Our Lord made me feel His presence, and the thought that soon I would be with Him in Heaven filled my heart with happiness. However, I slowly recovered because our Lord wanted to complete that which He had begun."<sup>10</sup>

Max recovered also and returned to Darfeld.

As it happened, that same year Leo XIII became aware of the young Maria Droste. Her parents, at peace because of Max's recovery, requested and obtained an audience with the Pope. They asked of him a special blessing for their daughter Maria, explaining that her health was preventing her from becoming a religious. Leo XIII listened to them and then said, "In so far as she is not healthy she should not enter the convent. It would be good neither for her nor for the community. However, leave her completely free for her spiritual exercises and for her works of charity."

These words of the Pope concerning Maria coincided exactly with her decision to ask her parents for greater freedom and availability for prayer and works of mercy.

### *All for her*

By the time her parents returned to Darfeld in the beginning of the summer of 1885, Maria was in fairly good health. The doctors advised that she have baths and sea air. For this, a health resort in Norderneg, a small island in the North Sea, was chosen. Her parents and her sister Augusta accompanied her. The latter described in her correspondence not only the beauty

of the location but also the pleasure of sail boat excursions.<sup>11</sup> Maria relates a different aspect of this stay by the sea.

"I went with my parents to an island called Norderneg, in the North Sea. As soon as we arrived we went to the Catholic church, the only one in this Protestant country. On entering it we noticed that the Blessed Sacrament was not reserved. 'Oh, my Jesus! Must I then live here without You?'

"However, we met a priest and with my father's permission I asked if the Blessed Sacrament could be kept in the church. He answered that there was no one to watch the church and keep the lamp burning, for he only came there once a week. When I asked him if our Lord could be there if I assumed those duties, he consented.

"The next morning at Holy Mass the priest consecrated the Sacred Host and our Lord began to dwell on the island for the first time. I was the first to light the sanctuary lamp. I cannot express what I felt. It seemed to me that He was there for love of me and was abandoned completely to me. I prepared everything for the Holy Sacrifice; I kept the tabernacle key, etc. Since there were several sick priests on the island I was able to have Mass every day."

"The Heart of Jesus is so grateful for the least service we can render Him. . . "<sup>12</sup>

### *New victories*

Her parents had been happy when they learned from Maria that she was convinced she should be a religious. Nevertheless, her mother, who had her own concept of what a religious should be, was not always of the opinion that Maria had a vocation to religious life. Her daughter's impulsiveness, still not completely overcome, seemed to the mother an insurmountable obstacle. The Countess went so far as to write Father Hauser to acquaint him with Maria's pattern of behavior and to confide her own fears

and doubts about the girl's aptitude for religious life. The priest answered:

"You must not worry too much about those weaknesses. Your judgment of your daughter seems sound, but your fears do not seem well founded. It is possible that a candidate for religious life lead a holy life in the world. But there are very many others with strong characters and even with somewhat difficult characters who enter religion and who are just like your dear Maria. Hers are the last struggles of nature before taking a decisive step. I have spoken often of these matters to Maria; so, you can be at peace. Her spirit is good, her motives are noble and pure, and God's blessing cannot be wanting."<sup>13</sup>

In 1886, with an ever clearer knowledge of her faults of character, Maria tried harder than ever to overcome them. Doing so was interior martyrdom for this twenty-three year old, who could have given place in her life to many other activities common to young women of her age, and still have remained true to her ideals.

"Our Lord in His infinite mercy gave me a confessor who was very helpful. I owe to him the fact that I conquered my character. I had not been happy with the confessor I had previous to him because that one had been too good and too indulgent toward me. I felt that I needed one who would hold the reins and at the same time to whom I could open my heart about my vocation. This turned out to be the pastor of whose sermon I have already spoken. Even though I did not speak to him about the favors our Lord had granted me, it is to him that I owe the changes I have made, at least in part, in my temperament. My impulsiveness has diminished, and this was the greatest of my difficulties. It has cost me much. My pride is still there, that pride that your reverence sees in me even today<sup>14</sup> and which is the root of all my difficulties."<sup>15</sup>

After this admission, Maria tells about her life at Darfeld in 1886.

"My confessor had great devotion to the Heart of Jesus. It was he who received me into the Confraternity of the Heart of Jesus and into the Apostleship of Prayer.

"We had a very regular life at home. We had daily Mass, and I received Holy Communion about three times a week. We meditated daily, read spiritual books with our parents, and prayed a third of the rosary in common. During the day we were occupied about the house. The chapel was always our greatest joy. We knew nothing of the wickedness of the world. It was only in the convent that I came to know what the world is.<sup>16</sup>

"Since I believed that in marriage one had to love a man a great deal, I was very vigilant over my heart so as not to let in any contrary human affection. I longed everyday for the religious life, but my health left much to be desired. I was resigned and I waited. It was not the convent which attracted me. What I wanted was to belong without reserve to our Lord, to sacrifice all for Him, all that I was and all that I had."<sup>17</sup>

### *Voluntary exile*

The words of Leo XIII, "you must leave her free," echoed in the ears of the Count and Countess when Maria disclosed to them a desire for a retired mode of life at home while she waited for her health to improve so that she could enter the convent. So, when she asked this, they did not refuse her.

However, on two points the Count was inflexible. Maria had her eye on a little attic room to which she wanted to withdraw. "No, my young daughter. This I cannot permit you. I leave you free to simplify everything in the room that has always been yours. Furthermore, I do not want you to select any dresses which look like a nun's habit. If you wish, I will permit you to dress

in black."<sup>18</sup>

The Countess, too, was not opposed to her daughter's desires. She was praying for Maria's complete recovery of health so that she might become a religious. From the family diary we know that on the 22nd of October, 1886, she wrote Miss Demazeau, Maria's childhood teacher, who was then residing in Lourdes:

"The idea has come to me to have a Mass offered in the sanctuary each day of November for Maria's complete cure and the realization of her desires, if this is the will of God."<sup>19</sup>

During the month that the requested Masses were offered in the sanctuary of Lourdes, Maria entered upon her new way of life, which she called her "novitiate at home." This was to last two years. During it her health flourished and her desires were directed toward an institute of which she had never before thought. To begin her new program she selected her favorite day.

"With the help of my Divine Spouse, all difficulties were overcome and on the 21 st of November, 1886, I began at home the life of a religious. I dressed in black and arranged my room as simply as possible. I intended neither to see strangers any more nor to become involved in domestic affairs. From then on, my occupations were only prayer, spiritual reading, work for the poor and for the Church, and visiting and assisting the poor. Everyone in the house respected my room as though it were the cell of a religious. There, for two years, I enjoyed the company of my Divine Spouse.

"November 21, 1886, has remained indelibly imprinted on my memory as an unforgettable day. I was not in the convent but I would live as if I were. Nor was the happiness of suffering for our Lord wanting to me. This new way of life drew upon me contradictions and humiliations from all sides. I esteemed these as graces

from our Lord because I needed them in order to learn how to conquer my pride and my self love. With His help, I became ever more detached from creatures. The thought of being the spouse of His Heart inspired me with strength and courage to put up with everything. The delay in my entrance into religion became less painful because it seemed to me I had almost arrived at the principal end of my vocation. I belonged to the Lord. I lived in solitude. I practiced poverty in as much as it was possible to me. One thing only was wanting to me I did not suffer enough. In order to make the sacrifice total I would have had to leave my family, whom I loved so much. . .

"During those two years of novitiate made at home, our Lord caused me to feel, in an exceptional way, His divine presence. He remained with me; He became my Companion, my Friend, my Confidant. The thought of being spouse of His Heart sweetened all bitterness and every deprivation and mortification. He was giving Himself entirely to me in the Blessed Sacrament, and sometimes the very thought of Him made me glow with love. Sometimes I felt so intimately united to Him that I could not leave Him. He was with me and I was with Him. He looked at me and I looked at Him. This was enough to make us understand one another and to cause me to taste the hidden delights of His Heart. It seemed impossible to pray; I was simply lost in the thought of Him.

"My greatest joy was to take care of the sanctuary lamp. Oh! what envy I had for that lamp which glows night and day before the Blessed Sacrament! It made my longing grow to be not only the spouse of the Heart of Jesus but also His victim. When I would light it, I would pray our Lord not to permit ever that His grace be dimmed in my heart. I would supplicate Him to burn me, to consume me with His love. He has heard my prayer. The oil of my life, which is my lamp, is consuming itself in bodily



suffering, and certainly it is the fire of His divine love which is consuming my heart, which He Himself enkindled because I offered myself to Him as victim, and He has accepted the sacrifice... A desire to make reparation for sins committed against His Heart, as also a desire to suffer for the conversion of sinners, grew always within me."<sup>20</sup>

Her words-"This new way of life drew upon me contradictions and humiliations from all sides" -prove that all was not easy. Negative reactions came not only from the workers, who were surprised at the change in the young countess, but her own brothers also began to criticize her conduct. This must have wrenched her heart because she deeply loved her brothers, especially Max, her twin.

Miss MacMahon, her lady-in-waiting, pictures Maria during these two years of withdrawal:

"Usually she had dinner with the family because the Count and Countess desired it so. Then she immediately withdrew, to the great displeasure of Max and William, who were unhappy about this voluntary exile. If there were guests, she did not come but rather dined in the children's room with her sister Elizabeth."<sup>21</sup>

Her sister Anna wrote:

"From 1886 to 1888 she led a very withdrawn life, almost like a religious, even though in the beginning this was not smiled upon by our father."<sup>22</sup>

In the countryside there were comments: "It is incredible. . . a folly, burying herself aHve. How can her parents permit this?"<sup>23</sup> Maria, however, as Miss MacMahon described her-"with her positive nature, sober and free from illusion" -kept straight ahead."<sup>24</sup>

*She held out her hand. . .*

When Maria was seeking the order she should join, she turned first, in 1888, to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery in Denmark, and then towards the Benedictines. Both had to be excluded either because of climate or way of life. She did not think of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

"I had considered several congregations but none of them seemed adapted to me, only the Good Shepherd of which I had never thought seriously because I felt that one needed a very special vocation for it. I had a very vague and confused idea of the unfortunate people 'who were the objects of the apostolate of the Sisters: I felt a great repugnance for certain miseries."<sup>25</sup>

And yet. . .

Much to the astonishment and apprehension of her mother, whose background and way of life caused her to have set attitudes towards certain social problems, a moment came when Maria Droste remembered the gospel text describing Jesus with the woman taken in adultery.

This incident took place in the course of one of the usual visits made by Maria and her mother to patients in the hospital. On this particular day they found a young woman, alone and ignored by visitors, who was pointed to as a "fallen woman." This is the way Maria recounts the event:

"I saw that my mother was taken aback and disturbed by the fact that I was near that unhappy person. She had always kept us far removed from the least shadow of evil. But I began to reflect if our Lord were here which of these sick persons would He treat with the greatest tenderness? Without doubt it would be this poor one. Conquering my natural repugnance and the expected reaction of my mother, I put out my hand to the unhappy girl. A very short

time afterwards I was convinced that I had to give my life for the conversion of these unhappy persons. "<sup>26</sup>

On that day a Good Shepherd vocation was born in Maria.

### *The Sisters of the Good Shepherd*

The religious congregation of the Good Shepherd of Angers today numbers over 9,000 Sisters on all continents, divided into 44 provinces. These Sisters carry on the difficult and delicate mission left them by their founders.

In 1641 Saint John Eudes had begun the Order of Our Lady of Charity for the special task of caring for women and girls who were outcasts of society. These religious had been dispersed by the French Revolution, and in 1804 a few of them began to group themselves together again in an old monastery in Tours, France. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity did not have a central government and each house operated independently.

Then, in 1814, an eighteen-year-old Vendean girl, Rose Virginie Pelletier, knocked at the door of the convent of Tours, asking to enter the community. She was accepted and given the name Sister Mary Euphrasia. When 29 she became superior of the house, and in 1829 answered an episcopal call to begin the apostolate of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Angers.

Within a short space of time there were many requests for new foundations and many young women joined her. The young superior conceived the idea, bold for the time, of transforming the monastic government into a central government, embracing all the existing houses and those yet to be founded. The new institute was given by its foundress the name "Good Shepherd" both to accent its mission and to distinguish it from those communities which preferred not to be part of the central generalate. This Congregation of the Good Shepherd was given canonical approval by Pope Gregory XVI in 1835. In 1868, at the death of Mother Pelletier<sup>27</sup> there were more than 3,000 Sisters of

the. Good Shepherd in 110 communities grouped into 16 provinces.

The apostolate of these Sisters is described in their constitutions:

"Our service is directed toward children, young people and adults who because of character, family, social, or behavior problems need special care, guidance, and education. Our work is a work of prevention, rehabilitation, and protection."<sup>28</sup>

Theirs is a delicate mission in which every effort must be made to avoid anything which might harm the reputation and esteem of the persons being assisted. The Sisters' present constitutions stress the spirit given them by their founders, a spirit of fervent prayer and zeal for souls. A major difference from the legislation which remained in force until the end of the nineteenth century, which envisioned collaboration with lay and civil authorities, is that of close cooperation with child caring agencies also.

### *There you must enter*

When Maria held out her hand in that hospital in Darfeld, she knew very little about the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. She realized they had a home in Munster, to which was annexed a novitiate. In the area, the Sisters were referred to as the "White Sisters" because of their white habits. The sequence of events leading her to the "White Sisters" is described in her autobiography:

"On the vigil of the feast of the Visitation of our Lady, I was waiting my turn for confession in the parish church of Darfeld. In a twinkling, my mind was illumined with the thought, 'You must enter the Good Shepherd,' and with such clarity as to remove any doubt. I knelt down at the confessional and told my confessor, 'I know now where to

go. I have to enter the Good Shepherd.' I was afraid he would ask me for how long I had thought of this, and hearing that it had just come into my mind at that very moment he would have scolded me. But he asked me no questions. He only responded that he would seek information, but that he could say immediately that that order was not for me.

"Our Lord permitted that I went on vacation for three months that summer to Lutkenbeck, a property of my father very near Munster. I confided my project to the Vicar General, who was my confessor when I was there and who a short time before had made a canonical visitation of the Good Shepherd for the bishop. He encouraged me to enter there because he had found a very good spirit and the life would not be too difficult health-wise.

"Because the convent was very near our property, the ringing of the bells could be heard. Each time I heard them it seemed that my Divine Spouse was calling me, giving me a loving and tender invitation. My desires grew from day to day until I resolved to speak about this to my mother, although I feared that she would not think me strong enough yet and that neither she nor my father would approve my entering that order.

"Before saying anything about that, I asked my mother if I might be seen by a doctor to find out if my health would permit me to enter the convent. After the consultation, my mother told me that the doctor found me still somewhat weak and that I would not be able for an extenuating work, that all would depend on the order I would choose. If I would choose to be a Sister of Charity he would not approve. If, however, I had the intention, for example, of entering the White Sisters, which was the popular name for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, he would not object. My mother, who knew nothing about my thoughts, then asked me which order I wanted. I answered that I desired

precisely to join the White Sisters. She was surprised and moved, and both she and my father expressed full satisfaction.

"I asked to be admitted, and during the month of the rosary everything was concluded. "<sup>29</sup>

Finally dawned a new day for Maria, who had relied on her God and abandoned herself to Him for five long years of waiting.

## Footnotes - CHAPTER II

1. *Autobiography* of Maria Droste zu Vischering, p. 215.
2. Chasle, Abbe Louis. *Sister Mary of the Divine Heart*. London: Burns & Oates, Ltd., 1907. p. 38.
3. Kerdreux, Michel de. *Comme Une Flamme*, Casterman: Editions' Salvator, Mulhouse, 1968. p. 83.
4. *Ibid*, p. 82.
5. *Autobiography*, p. 224.
6. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
7. *Autobiography*, p. 229.
8. *Ibid*, p. 228.
9. *Ibid*, p. 228, f.
10. *Ibid*, p. 227 f.
11. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
12. *Autobiography*, p. 226-227.
13. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
14. *Maria* is writing these notes for her confessor in Oporto.
15. *Autobiography*, p. 229.
16. Because of the particular apostolate of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.
17. *Autobiography*, p. 230.
18. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
19. *Ibid*, p. 95.
20. *Autobiography*, pp. 231-233.
21. Kerdreux. *op. cit.*, p. 97.
22. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 63.
23. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
24. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 536.
25. *Autobiography*, p. 236.
26. *Ibid*, p. 236.
27. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier was canonized May 2, 1940.
28. Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, revised according to the documents of Vatican II and Post Conciliar Pontifical Documents, by the special general chapter of 1969. Juridical Norm No. 2.
29. *Autobiography*, pp. 237-8



*Maria Droste at 20*



*Maria as a novice at Munster*



## Chapter III

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD OF MUNSTER (1888-1894)

In 1913, she who had been directress of the Good Shepherd novitiate of Munster gave the following appraisal of her former novice, Maria Droste: "I did not notice anything particularly extraordinary in her... As a novice she practiced the vows like any other fervent novice. . . During her novitiate she especially took over any rough work, and always graciously. She showed a humility which was real; she never tried to flaunt her knowledge or talents."<sup>1</sup>

In saying this the novice mistress had placed Maria's personality in focus. For, Maria seemed like the other novices, and even after the conclusion of the years of novitiate she, like the others, was far from perfect. Yet, she was not like the others. For one thing, she was by family background from the nobility. Also, more than her companions, was she noble in her humility.

The provincial superior, Sister Mary Angela Gartmann, in 1911 specified:

"I learned from the sisters and from other factual witnesses that she willingly took upon herself the heavy and menial work, and that very ably."<sup>2</sup>

This quality must have said something to others because, as anyone who has lived religious community life knows, certain less pleasant tasks of common life may be avoided even by those who are familiar with hard work. Maria's autobiographical notes disclose that she assumed these tasks to help forget her past way of life.

This present chapter embraces the five years of religious life passed by Maria in the Good Shepherd of Munster. Her

autobiographical notes, family correspondence and diaries, and witnesses of the canonical processes provide material on this period. She will later be called to a noble mission among the needy of Portugal and also to a very particular ecclesial mission. Her five years from 1888 to 1894 prepared her for both missions. During this interval she matured spiritually not simply because of the unusual spiritual gifts granted her in abundance, but even more because of her unconditional response of fidelity and her desire for ever more complete renunciation.

### *Preparations*

One does not embrace a religious order without knowing something about it. After making her choice, Maria wrote her spiritual director. Following Father Hauser's death in 1887, this was Don Boetel, pastor of the Darfeld parish. He approved her selection. She also asked three explicit questions of the Vicar General, her confessor while she was in Munster: What is the spirit of zeal for the salvation of souls of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd? Has the Congregation obtained pontifical approval? If I chose a religious convent in Munster, a fact which would ease the problem of climate, could I be at peace within myself?"

Answers to all three questions were clear and affirmative. The Vicar General knew the community because of the canonical visitation he had made there.

Positive, too, was the response from the apostolic vicar of Copenhagen, to whom Maria wrote to inform him of what she was doing and to withdraw her request to become a Sister of St. Joseph. He congratulated her for having chosen "the heroic order of the Good Shepherd" and wished her perseverance in her "more complete sacrifice, more complete than would have been the case in Denmark."<sup>3</sup>

All Maria needed now was officially to request admission to the Good Shepherd.

"Dear Reverend Mother. After having had the joy of speaking with you about my vocation last week and after learning about the apostolate of the Good Shepherd, my conviction that this is where God wants me has been strengthened. I have also received a response from Denmark and all obstacles are removed. Therefore, I ask the favor of being received into the Good Shepherd. I know I am unworthy of this favor because I am so imperfect but, believe me, dear Mother, I am firmly resolved to do all I can to be faithful to my calling. All I want in the Good Shepherd is to lead a hidden life, entirely consecrated to God and to souls, in whatever place and in whatever way it may be. I consider the work of the Good Shepherd so noble and so sublime that I could never succeed in thanking God sufficiently for calling me to it."<sup>4</sup>

In her autobiography Maria adds:

"I chose November 21st for my entrance, and Our Lady let me go with her into the house of God. My most ardent desire was granted and yet I felt deeply the pain of the sacrifice I was making. How it cost me to leave my home, my dear poor, the people of the parish who were so good and who loved me so much, the chapel and church where I had received so many graces! But the thought of becoming the spouse of the Heart of Jesus gave me the necessary strength to make this sacrifice."<sup>5</sup>

She would miss her family deeply through the remaining eleven years of her life, and even on her deathbed she will need to offer to God her immense affection for family and country. At Oporto, Portugal, a cross would hang over her bed. After her death under that cross was found a piece of paper on which were written the names of each member of her family.<sup>6</sup>

During the last visit from her parents before her death, suspecting that they might want to transfer her body to Darfeld, she said to them. "I want to remain in Oporto; don't take my body

away from here."<sup>7</sup>

This was the Maria who knocked at the door of the Good Shepherd of Munster.

*November 21, 1888*

Again, it was her special day. Her parents and sisters accompanied her to the convent. She believed that she was going to the home of her spouse and that His Mother received her there and presented her to her Son. Maria describes what went on in her on that day:

"Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, my parents and sisters accompanied me to the convent. Before ringing the doorbell we visited the church. What was not my joy when I found there the Blessed Sacrament exposed! My Spouse, my Jesus, was waiting for me with His Heart open to receive me. I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. I felt my heart burn within me with love, with desire to be all His and to possess Him completely. The Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament has been my guide; for many years he had called me and now He was there to welcome me into the convent, where I would sacrifice myself as victim and spouse and where I would always receive, ever more abundantly, His graces and His mercy.

"I intoned the Magnificat. These were the only words with which I could express what I was feeling. I will never forget the impressions of that day. My Divine Spouse was the first to welcome me into the convent, which I was entering only for Him because outside of Him I desired nothing.

"My parents blessed me and confided me to the provincial, who welcomed me with motherly tenderness and led me into the cloister. Soon, the bell rang for Benediction, and the same superior accompanied me into

the sisters' chapel. Oh! what blessed moments! Finally I had arrived at the goal I had desired for many years. . . What peace! What an intimate, holy, consoling union!"<sup>8</sup>

### *Imagination?*

On the next day Maria was given the postulant's dress and began anticipating her formal reception into the novitiate and receiving a new name. What name could the provincial give this daughter of the Droste family? Would Maria be able to express the desire of her heart?

"I quickly learned that there was already a religious named Maria of the Heart of Jesus, the name I had thought should be mine. I was disappointed to know that there was a sister with this name. But didn't Our Lord want me as spouse of His Heart? Were His promises of 1884 and all the other favors He had given me only illusions of my imagination? I resigned myself to God's will, which had never deceived me and which had already prepared everything for me."<sup>9</sup>

Maria preferred to attribute everything to fantasy rather than to a want of fidelity on the part of her Spouse, and so she found peace and serenity.

Two letters written about this time tell of Maria's initial adjustment. The first of these letters was written by her mother, after a visit to the Good Shepherd, to her daughter Teresa, then at school at Blummental:

"You can imagine my joy when the door opened and there was Maria in her postulant's dress, radiant with joy. The light of happiness in her eyes reassured me immediately. She told me that she was very well in the novitiate and that the sisters were very kind, especially the novice mistress. She kept repeating: 'I am happy, and I never want to go back no matter what the cost.'<sup>10</sup>

The second letter is from Maria herself written to her parents:

"Every day my love for the Home of the Good Shepherd deepens. I am certain I belong here. You cannot imagine how beautiful and inspiring everything is. All is done with simplicity and spontaneity, without any semblance of pettiness or rigorism. It is as though Our Lord directs everything."<sup>11</sup>

In another letter she reiterates her happiness. Her only anxiety is the poor whom she has left behind in Darfeld. She recommends them to the charity of her mother.

In spite of all this Countess Helen still wanted to be more sure of her daughter's vocation and so asked her brother, then canon of the cathedral of Munster, to visit the Good Shepherd. After spending forty-five minutes with his niece, Monsignor van Galen reflected to his sister, "It is most satisfying to see such a happy religious."<sup>12</sup>

Toward the end of December the provincial wrote the Droste family:

"Maria's joyous enthusiasm in taking part in community life removes any doubt about her vocation. We have set the date for her clothing during the octave of the Epiphany."<sup>13</sup>

*A name. . . a program*

The date of her reception of the habit was fixed for the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, 1889. A name would be given her.

"Several days before my clothing the provincial called me and asked me if I had any special desire concerning a name. Since I could not have that of Maria of the Heart of Jesus, I answered no. She then told me she had thought to give me either Maria of the Divine Heart or Maria of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. I was astonished and deeply moved.

He had not let me down. It is needless to say which of these two names I chose. My wonder was all the greater because that name was not often used in Germany. Even my family found it a little odd, but I well knew it was to be my name and none other. Up to that moment no one in the province had had that name. In this way the Lord kept His promise, deepening at the same time my confidence in Him and my desire to suffer for Him. A spouse of Jesus cannot be for one moment without suffering. and the realization that one cannot love Him enough or as much as He desires to be loved and to see Him loved so little is in itself a great suffering."<sup>14</sup>

January 10th, 1889, is a memorable date in the life of another holy young religious. On the same day at the same hour in the Carmel of Lisieux, France, a sixteen-year-old was taking the Carmelite habit. To her also was given a significant name, that of Teresa the great mystic, with the addition "of the Child Jesus." The saint of Lisieux was to go the way of spiritual childhood. To Maria Droste, who had desired to be called "Maria of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," her superiors gave the name "Maria of the Divine Heart." Perhaps this is not so much a play on words as an affirmation of a mystery.

Maria had always been convinced and would still be convinced that she could not separate adoration of the Heart of Jesus from His Presence in the Eucharist. The Heart of Jesus is in the Eucharist, not as a symbol but in reality with His humanity and His divinity, as a sign of love and of mercy for all humanity. Maria of the Divine Heart will need to learn more about this thirst of God's mercy towards the entire human race. She will be asked to suffer much because of this thirst until the moment she sees it satisfied by means of the consecration of the entire world to His Heart.

### *The reception of the habit*

Regarding the ceremony at which Maria received the Good

Shepherd habit, there are two principal sources of information: that of a relative who attended and that of Maria herself. The first described the beauty of the novice-dressed as a bride in a gown chosen by her father which would later be made into an altar cloth for the little chapel in Darfeld.

"She was so beautiful and above all so happy in her bridal dress with the long veil and the bouquet of myrtle against her breast. She sang a verse in Latin with an accent of rejoicing, as if to show clearly that the song came from her heart. The sisters later declared that no previous novice had been able to sing this verse by herself, because of the emotions of the moment. I cannot describe how radiant and at the same time how serene Maria was.

"After the ceremony, dressed in her religious habit with the white veil of a novice, she came to the parlor and each of us observed her natural beauty, her simplicity, her familiar gaiety. Only one thing lessened her joy and that of her dear ones-the moment of separation."<sup>15</sup>

The second witness, Maria herself, describes her emotions on this day which was one of her happiest. When recalling it she becomes almost musical.

"The day on which I received the religious habit was one of the happiest of my life. What I felt as I took off my secular clothes to put on the religious habit only my Spouse can know, and I will never be able to describe it. I sang with all the fervor of my heart and soul the words from the ceremony ritual: 'Regnum mundi et omnem ornatum saeculi contempsimus propter amorem Domini mei Jesu Christi, quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi!'

"Yes, I had left joyfully, the vanities of the world and the tenderness of my family, for love of Him Who from my youth had called me with so much love, so much



tenderness, and I was ready with but one desire-to live and to die for Him.

"*Quem vidi*,' often with the eyes of faith in the Blessed Sacrament and when receiving heavenly favors; '*quem amavi*,' first, before any other human love could divide my heart; '*in quem credidi*,' for He called me to be the spouse of His Heart; '*quem dilexi*,' to Him this day I gave myself without reserve as spouse and victim, desiring only to love-right to the last breath of my life.

" 'How beautiful is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts. My soul melts within me desiring the courts of the Lord,' sang the psalmist. And just as we say in the psalm that the sparrow has found her nest, I also had found my place of rest, my repose, my dwelling in the Heart of Jesus. With what tenderness He was giving Himself to me in Communion on this so happy day.

"My superior, an elderly religious and a person all for God, led me to the novitiate and confided me to the care of the directress of novices, Sister Maria of the Heart of Jesus. In the novitiate I was to prepare myself from the very first moment to immolate myself as a victim."<sup>16</sup>

Her maternal uncle, Monsignor Maximillian von Galen, officiated at the ceremony and so was the first to call her "Sister Maria of the Divine Heart."

### *Experiencing the Apostolate*

The rules of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, formerly as now, require two years of novitiate during which the novices, besides receiving formation in the spiritual life and the purpose of the institute, are given opportunity to test their aptitude for the particular apostolate of the community. Sister Maria Divine Heart was put to work immediately. A few days after her clothing she was assigned to help the receptionist and very shortly after that

was also provided experience with the young girls cared for by the sisters. We know of these two activities from a letter to her spiritual director, Father Boetel, who about this time was transferred from Darfeld to the parish of Ahans:

"It is only three months since I entered here, and I am more and more convinced that I love this Institute and its apostolate.

"In my difficulties I think of the maxim you suggested to me when I said goodbye to you: 'Keep your ideals high and you will be capable of everything.' This advice has helped me considerably in the moments when discouragement comes and when holiness seems beyond my reach.

"And as for my irascible and petulant temperament, thanks be to God I have not yet had difficulty with that. . . But you must pray for me so that these faults will disappear and that I can make my own the sweetness and humility of the Heart of Jesus.

"You already know from my mother that I work with the receptionist and so need to walk a great deal. If I counted all the steps I take during a day, they would surely cover the distance from the castle to the village of Darfeld . . .

"To my great joy I also go every day to the boarders during the week from 8: 00 to 9: 30 to be with them during their sewing period. Now and again they pray and sing. On Sundays I am with them during their playtime. It is impossible for me to tell you how happy I am to be with them; it is what I prefer. With them I learn to forget myself and to be ready to make sacrifices for the salvation of souls. From my contact with these girls I learn to pray better because only by God's grace can they be changed. In my group there are ninety, and I already know most of their names.

"We have thirty sewing machines. I am not used to the noise they make; however, I am happy when I hear it as that means the girls are working calmly.

"I recommend them to your prayers; some of them have great need. It is consoling to see how grace works and how it slowly transforms them. How happy I am to collaborate in the salvation of souls right from my novitiate.

"As to my interior life, I don't think there are any particular difficulties, and I am going straight ahead. What is difficult, as you can imagine, is the war I must make upon my weak nature. You know well that I have never been able to practice with ease the counsel of Jesus, 'In patience you will possess your soul,' but I hope little by little to arrive there also."<sup>17</sup>

The superior and the novice mistress felt that the two types of activity assigned Maria as novice would help ease a certain tension which they noticed in her, caused by attraction for prayer.

The novice mistress often urged her to get some fresh air in the garden before going to the girls. The provincial, too, who must have been an understanding woman, would smile and say to her when she met her in the halls, "Run a little bit, my dear; run! It will do you good and relax you." Sister Maria then and there would run like an arrow, just as she used to do in the fields of Darfeld.<sup>18</sup>

*To suffer because unable to suffer*

Maria's Portuguese spiritual director, Monsignor Teutonio E. Ribeiro de Castro, would later say that her characteristic virtues were an insatiable zeal for the salvation of souls and a powerful desire to suffer for the Heart of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Father de Castro's convictions about Maria came not only from his direct observations during the years he was her spiritual director from April, 1896, until her death-but also from reading the two filled

notebooks "in which," he affirms, "with charming simplicity and humility she recounts many events of her life, some of them intimate secrets of her soul, events which took place from her birth right up to the eve of her religious profession." <sup>20</sup>

A biography of Maria of the Divine Heart would be incomplete without those last pages of her autobiography which describe her novitiate. During those two years she experienced extraordinary spiritual gifts which allow the affirmation to be made that she had already arrived at what masters of spirituality have traditionally termed the "unitive way," a top-level, as it were, of the spiritual life.

"By His words of instruction. of consolation. of love, which I received while at home and during my novitiate, I can truly say that our Lord Himself directed me, even though as need and opportunity arose I submitted always to my director." <sup>21</sup>

This was possible for her while she was at Darfeld and had Father Hauser as director, and after his death Father Boetel. But during her novitiate, Maria was not able to enjoy the guidance of a director.

"I passed the time of my novitiate with, on the one hand, His graces, and on the other hand, struggles which sometimes seemed infernal. To add to my trials I was without a director to whom I could open my heart. I kept hidden the greater part of those struggles because sin was not involved, and I also remained silent about the graces I received. I could do this because ever since I was a child I had been used to having an expert spiritual director. It cost me a great deal not to have someone in whom I could confide. I once spoke of this difficulty to the provincial and to the novice mistress, but I was never able to tell everything for if I mentioned some grace I could not give a full explanation of it. It seemed to me that I would not be understood and that our Lord permitted this for my ever

greater mortification."<sup>22</sup>

Maria kept to herself the extraordinary aspects of her life of union with Christ and confided to the superior only her struggles, temptations, and doubts about her vocation.

In but a few lines of her autobiography she described the graces she received.

"During my novitiate our Lord consoled me several times during Communion and on days of Exposition. It was then that He taught me to bear the cross and made me understand that my sufferings would increase and that I would need to take up the cross and remain united and nailed to it with Him."<sup>23</sup>

To her struggles she devoted one page which sounds not unlike the great mystic of Carmel, Teresa of Avila.

"Six months after my entrance into the novitiate our Lord began to send me interior pains which tormented me for a long time. I doubted my specific vocation, not as a religious because about that I never had any doubt, but I experienced an attraction for a contemplative order and I was tempted to think I no longer was called to the Good Shepherd. The life of a Good Shepherd sister seemed to me to require too much activity while, for my part, I was experiencing special graces of union with our Lord. My Divine Spouse caused me to feel His presence in such a vivid manner; He filled me with such hunger and thirst for possessing and loving Him that sometimes it seemed impossible to keep on living. Ah! in such moments it seems that the soul is imprisoned and that our bodies impede it from flying towards its only good. Desires to die filled me at those moments. In order to be united to Him, to love Him Who alone can satisfy us, one would pass through all the sufferings of hell.

"These graces of intimate union with our Lord, this hunger for Him was so strong that my heart could actually feel it. This should not cause wonder because it seems to me that such heavenly favors are not compatible with our physical powers. To fully live this life of union is to enjoy the vision of God in glory, and for that we must die. The body itself cannot enjoy new life until it has been reduced to dust. Therefore, if we wish to unite ourselves to God in this life, we must mortify our flesh.

"The soul favored in this way by our Lord must prepare itself for many bodily sufferings. A soul on fire with desire to love and possess God needs corporal sufferings in order to soothe it. Suffering, humiliation, abandonment are never enough for one who wishes to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore I endured terrible temptations, torments of conscience, memories of my family, spiritual and bodily sufferings-but always I suffered from not being able to suffer more."<sup>24</sup>

#### *When God speaks, nature is silenced*

Maria, in her desire for ever more suffering, demonstrated a type of love which reaches heroic proportions in the saints. In fact, her Benedictine cousin Dom Augustine von Galen, states:

"Whoever knew her when she lived in Darfeld and observed how passionately and warmly she loved her own, that person can easily understand how heroic was her determination."<sup>25</sup>

What determination? Her resolve to leave her dear ones in every way in order to suffer more for Christ. She was prepared to give up even her correspondence because "it is a thread which reunited us each time. My God asks of me a complete renunciation so that I may be entirely His."<sup>26</sup>

Right from the beginning of the novitiate, in 1889, she wrote

her brother, Max, telling him not to visit her in Munster. This letter must have been an incomparable sacrifice because when near to death she wrote on a page watered with tears,

"In the novitiate our Lord inspired me with a desire to be detached from everything. But what torment I had to put up with on account of my love for my brother, Max. It seems to me that love between twins is more intense than any other; nature passes through the anguish of death in seeing oneself separated from a twin brother. I cannot describe what I suffered during the first four years of our separation. I did not pass a single day without weeping, and how bitter were those tears!... O, my God! if it had not been for You I would not have had the strength to sacrifice that brother I loved so much. But with God's grace we can do everything. I succeeded. What hurt me most was knowing that he suffered the same. When I left home he could not stay there anymore; he could not relax anymore. Everything reminded him of me. Our Lord, who is always so good, had pity on him and left me in Munster until he got married. "<sup>27</sup>

On this subject, De Kerdreux reflects:

"This sacrifice of family would be more than sufficient if it applied only to her aunts, uncles and cousins... But she went beyond even this and wanted to break all contact with her parents. Convinced that her mother would understand, she wrote her father, whom she knew would be opposed:

"My dear father. Today we concluded our retreat. I cannot tell you how beautiful it was to be all alone with God, without thought of any activities or duties, without distraction. My reason for this particular letter is to tell you that God is asking of us a fresh sacrifice.

"During these past days of retreat, after much reflection and prayer, I realized that while I am in the novitiate I should remain in as much solitude as possible.

Consequently, we must sacrifice to God our usual exchange of letters.'

"When God speaks, nature is silenced. "28

This time Maria's generosity did not meet with her mother's approval, as she had thought it would. The Countess went to the Good Shepherd convent and told the provincial, "My husband feels that a novice can be ready to sacrifice everything, but that she does not have the right to exact from her parents more than is prescribed by the rule. . ."

The provincial agreed that some limits had to be put to this novice's misguided fervor.

### *An exceptional novice*

The novice mistress, as mentioned earlier, found nothing extraordinary in Sister Maria, perhaps because exteriorly Maria seemed like the others and it was not in God's plan that she know how exceptionally favored was this novice.

Such was not the case, however, with Sister Mary Lambert, the provincial. She was not slow to see in Sister Maria of the Divine Heart an "exceptional novice." When observing her, the words of the Foundress echoed within her. Saint Mary Euphrasia, speaking about a foundation in Munich, the first Good Shepherd Home in Germany said, "How I love our German sisters! They are models of virtue with genuine vocations and very attached to the Institute."

This superior was even more convinced that Maria was exceptional when after eighteen months of uncertainty, the novice humbly and simply began to open herself and to confide her struggles to her.

Sister Lambert did not live to see the opening of the apostolic process investigating Maria's sanctity and so did not give her



own witness. However, the archives of the Munster convent have preserved some letters from Maria to her. These letters show the novice seeking to find out if her vocation was genuine.

In September, 1890, Maria wrote her:

"My dear Mother: You know my many temptations and struggles, all of which reveal how my courage has been tried. But these are nothing compared to the state I have been in for some time now. I do not know if this comes from God or from my own fantasy.

"First-I feel virtually penetrated with God, drawn to Him in such a way as to be unable to resist Him.

"Secondly-During prayer, while meditating, at Holy Communion, it happens so often that I am so deeply lost in God that I do not even know what I am saying. It is as though I were resting in love. In spite of this, I often have to work hard at resisting the disgust and repugnance I encounter when I begin to pray. I am cold, arid. . .

"This condition causes in my soul:

"First-A greater awareness of my own misery and unworthiness, coupled with a clearer understanding of God's infinite mercy.

"Secondly-A more lively desire to love our good God and to sacrifice myself for Him without any reservation.

"Thirdly-A greater desire to detach myself absolutely from all that is human and earthly and to abandon myself completely to God.

"Fourthly-A greater readiness to suffer all for God and to sacrifice myself for His glory.

"Fifthly-A growing desire to be guided completely by obedience.

"All of this affects me physically. My only relaxation is in spiritual reading. Every other occupation is difficult for me.

"However, because I do not want in any way to depart from obedience, I beg you, dear Mother, order me to do whatever you want."<sup>29</sup>

In November, 1890, two months before her profession, she wrote:

"My dear Mother. You know my struggles but you do not know how much I have suffered for the past year and a half. Internal and external struggles, temptations, doubts... have come with such force that I have often been overwhelmed by them. But now I see clearly how our good God has permitted all this for my own welfare. I can say sincerely, that, with His Grace, I am now externally calm. It would seem that He has subdued my nature by His grace, in spite of the fact that occasions for sacrifice are not wanting. Now it seems to me I have entered a new life. I feel I must tell you all this so that I may follow where our God wants to lead me. For some time I have felt drawn to the contemplative life, and this attraction grows in me the closer the day of my profession approaches. It seems to me that all the inspirations, all the interior lights I receive in meditation, in reading, in Holy Communion, and in other exercises of piety attract me to the contemplative life.

"Grace is working so powerfully that I cannot doubt it is God's voice calling me. The effects of this on my exterior are:

"1st-More fervor, more joy in my work because my spirit remains united to God.

"2nd-Exterior things do not disturb or distract me.

"3rd-Very rarely do I lose my inner peace because of temptation or difficulty.

"Yet, withal, this state brings fresh opportunities for martyrdom;  
it seems I am always hungry and never satisfied.

"Do tell me, dear Mother, whether I must follow this attraction and, if so, how. The fear of deceiving myself and of not corresponding to God's word which is so distinct causes me to suffer a great deal. I beg you to help me to walk along this path, if you feel it is what God wants, so that I may sacrifice myself continually, that I may be vigilant and faithful, and that I may struggle unceasingly against my nature. I place all my trust in God.

"I am conscious that I cannot travel on this path without your guidance, Mother. Therefore, in spite of my great repugnance, I have decided to reveal to you my entire interior life."<sup>30</sup>

Sister Mary Lambert had given to Maria the Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation. She responded: "It is decided! It is absolutely certain that you are in the right place. These struggles will cease after your profession. Our Lord is all powerful. Your aim must be to live faithfully Article II of our Directory. If you do this, you will arrive at union with our Lord from Whom you have received your vocation to the Good Shepherd. So, study our books of rule. They contain all that is necessary for us to become saints."<sup>31</sup>

Notes made by the novice show that struggles and temptations concerning her vocation lasted until the eve of her profession.

*May he return to the Heart of Christ*

Maria Droste was called to be a victim of reparation for offenses against the love of Jesus and in particular was she to be a victim for priests. In her life, a continuous thread or plan of Providence, preparing her to offer herself as victim, can be detected. Significant dates coincide with circumstances which put her in contact with persons who needed her intercession.

The day of her birth she had been baptized by a Mason in Munster; her religious profession involved a priest who later apostatized. This is recorded on the last page of her autobiography:

"The end of my novitiate was approaching and temptations only increased. I was on the verge of going home.

"During the November, 1890, retreat, I explained my doubts to the retreat director. Our Lord permitted that this priest did not understand me. I was greatly disturbed after my general confession because I saw that he did not know how to advise me. He consulted the superior, and since she was convinced of my vocation, he told me that I should remain.

"How many struggles I had during those days! I suffered a repugnance such as I had never before endured. All was darkness and when I thought of my profession it seemed that I would be throwing myself, with eyes closed, into an abyss. My Spouse, however, did not abandon me. While I was all but desperate, His Heart was watching.

"Something happened to me concerning this priest. I experienced a type of interior conviction which I have described before-that a certain person would either become a great saint or a great sinner.

I began to fear for him. I never stopped praying for him.

Two years later he left his order, then left the Church and married. And yet it is to him that I owe the fact that I remained in the Good Shepherd Congregation. May the Divine Heart of Jesus have compassion on him!"<sup>32</sup>

Maria was stunned by this event. Afterwards when comments were made about the priest in the community she said, "I fear for myself because it could happen to me also."<sup>33</sup>

### *Profession*

Sister Maria of the Divine Heart made her profession January 9, 1891. The new bishop of Munster, Monsignor Dinglestadt, presided. Her family was present. This time it was not the count who accompanied his daughter to the altar, but the novice mistress. In her memoirs, Augusta Droste noted:

"It was a beautiful and moving ceremony. Maria was radiant with heavenly joy. We were all present, even William's fiancée.<sup>34</sup> In the afternoon we went into the convent to have more time with our Maria."<sup>35</sup>

At that time, the profession ceremony symbolized death to the world. The professed, before pronouncing their vows, prostrated on the ground. Sister Maria recalled in her personal diary her emotions and her intentions as she went through that symbolic prostration.

January 29, 1891. O, Jesus. grant me

The grace never to offend my God by a voluntary fault, particularly one contrary to my vows and to my perseverance in my vocation.

- Grant me the grace to correspond perfectly to God's designs for His glory, for the salvation of souls, and for my own sanctification;

- grant me the grace of a continuous union with God even in the midst of external activity;

- grant that I may act in every circumstance for the love of

God;

- grant me the grace never to seek my personal satisfaction;
- the grace to become a victim of His love;
- the grace of obtaining a pure and perfect love of God.

"On this day of my profession only one thought filled my mind: at last I was one with Jesus! At Holy Communion I was penetrated by feelings of the intimate union which was being contracted with Him. I felt that He possessed me as spouse, that the Spouse was taking His spouse. These are not moments which belong to this world. I was as if transformed, and I felt this so strongly that I was dominated by this impression for several weeks. For me there was nothing but Jesus. He is mine, and I am His!"<sup>36</sup>

That 29th of January, Sister Maria of the Divine Heart left the novitiate and went to the convent of the professed sisters to await her first assignment.

### *More noble by charity*

The main source of information about Maria Droste before January 29, 1891, is her own life story which she wrote at the request of her spiritual director and signed May 5, 1899, a month before her death.

"With these two notebooks," attests Monsignor Ribeiro, "there is a letter dated May 5, 1899, in which Maria says that she had confided her most intimate secrets to me and that she was deeply confused when considering the many graces about which she was telling me. She asked me to thank Jesus in her name for the mercy He had lavished on her. She intended to continue her narration and to describe the many graces which were granted to her during the rest of her life, but her health weakened and she died one month later without having been able to realize this plan."<sup>37</sup>

All events recorded in her autobiography, with the exception of her extraordinary graces, are confirmed by the witness given during the apostolic process by her parents, relatives, and others in Darfeld, and by her superiors and sisters in the convents of Munster and Oporto.<sup>38</sup>

All the witnesses who were questioned, even those who knew nothing about the extraordinary in her life of union with God, unanimously affirmed that she was balanced and normal. Her sister Elizabeth testified:

"Our brothers and sisters, as also our parents-especially my mother-were very surprised when they learned from her spiritual director about her divine communications. We had never observed anything extraordinary in her."<sup>39</sup>

Her cousin Helena von Galen confirmed this:

"Maria had an explosive personality, very lively, and this was a dominant note in her temperament. She made great efforts to control herself. Her mother later confided to me that she did not know how Maria, of all her children, managed to be holy because her vivacious character had always caused apprehension."<sup>40</sup>

Her sister-in-law, William's wife, noted:

"The first time I met Maria was in Blummental, where I was in boarding school, in 1888, shortly before she entered the Good Shepherd. I had expected to meet a pious snob, but I was pleasantly surprised to find her happy, wide-awake, and serene."<sup>41</sup>

From her autobiography we know about her daily interior struggles before choosing the religious life and then of her doubts as to whether she was really called to the Good Shepherd. The superior, during her novitiate, had assured her, "These struggles will cease after your profession."<sup>42</sup> And so it was.

After pronouncing her three vows, to which was added the fourth vow proper to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to give one's life for the salvation of those persons needing special help Sister Maria embraced wholeheartedly the apostolate of the community.

About five months after her profession, on June 4, 1891, Sister Mary Lambert, she to whom Maria had confided something of her intimate soul and who had helped her so much, died. This deprived her of her superior's support.

Like the Good Shepherd it was Maria's duty now to search for the lost sheep, to place them on her shoulders and bring them back to the fold. She was to enter officially upon the mission of the Church and assume the ecclesial task proper to the Congregation of the Good Shepherd.

The free gift of her divine 'communications continued to bring both consolation and suffering to her, but now she was a Sister of the Good Shepherd. In living and growing in the charism received from the foundress, she was to make more visible Christ as Good Shepherd and lead into His Kingdom many souls.

Within the cloister she was truly in the midst of the world. Good Shepherd Sisters are in close touch with real life because of their service to youth and families who have been bruised by life's experiences; to women in prison who are paying civil penalties imposed because of their experience of misery; to girls and women who have emerged from anguished encounters of all kinds-persons who, once embraced by the love of the sisters and with God's grace, have hope for a new way of life.

Maria Droste, noble by blood, in becoming a Sister of the Good Shepherd and espousing its apostolate became more noble through her charity.



## *Director*

During the first five months following her vows, Maria continued as an aide to the sister who was director of the girls' section, Sister Teresa Wissing.

A new provincial, Sister M. Agnes Nacke, had replaced Sister M. Lambert Bouchy, and one of her first acts was to transfer Sister Wissing to another community. So it was, that on July 31, 1891, Sister Mary Divine Heart was appointed director of the girls. This surprised everyone. Still grieving because of the death of her beloved superior, Sister Maria saw in her new appointment a new cross. But. . .

"Obedience has appointed me director of our young girls. My God! I can do nothing. It is You who now must do everything. I accept this task, so difficult and filled with responsibility, only by confiding in You. I want to seek only You, Your glory and the salvation of souls; my portion will be the cross and sacrifice."<sup>43</sup>

Sister Maria did not exaggerate, neither in her confidence in God nor in her humility. The role of director of a Good Shepherd Home was the most responsible position after that of the superior. While the latter was spiritual and apostolic leader of the community of Sisters, to the director was confided the full responsibility, spiritual and educational, for the young girls. In the Good Shepherd this was a delicate and heavy responsibility.

Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, too, had had this responsibility in Tours, France, soon after her profession.

Maria Droste would remain in this office for about two and a half years. It would be her difficult daily task, more exacting for her because it meant restricting the time she could dedicate to prayer. Her basic balance won out when she discerned which was more pleasing to God-obedience or sacrifice:

"Often in moments of intense or particular fatigue, with a choice of a longer rest which would have deprived me of Mass and Holy Communion; or, because my sleep had been interrupted at night by the ever-recurring emergencies involved in my work, I gave up Holy Mass and Communion so as not to compromise the service to the girls."<sup>44</sup>

As director, Maria had the over-all responsibility for all departments in the Home for Girls-laundry, ironing room, sewing room, kitchen, housekeeping duties, singing, education, moral, religious, and catechetical instruction, and counselling. These duties can seem relatively simple when organized and distributed among various department heads. But in the Good Shepherd anything can happen. Each day brought unforeseen emergencies. The girls could be emotionally upset because of the heaviness of heart which was frequently theirs and the pain, never long absent, caused by deep hurts which had been inflicted upon them from their earliest years.

How did Maria succeed in this situation? Her diary shows that during this time she was particularly eager to incorporate a vision of faith into all that she did. She believed, she trusted, she saw Christ present in her young girls, she guided and encouraged, and she tried to make herself equally available to all. If she had any preferences among the girls, it was for those who were the most needy, the most unhappy.

Sister Angela Gartmann describes Maria Droste at this period of her life:

"It was well known here in Munster, when she was on her way to the girls she would first go before the Blessed Sacrament to receive a blessing. She was particularly attentive to the most suffering and disturbed among the girls. One of her sister aides, who taught dressmaking with her, said that when misunderstandings arose among the girls, Sister Maria was always the first to work out a

solution."<sup>45</sup>

In her autobiography, Maria wrote about her ministry to her girls:

"There is no greater consolation than that of being able to care for a little lost lamb and imitating the loving and merciful Heart of Jesus. I have always recommended to Him these poor little ones. When I found one very rebellious, I would remind Him I was the spouse of His Heart; therefore, He must give this soul to me. It is to the Heart of Jesus alone that I attribute the good response I had from the girls when I was director. Very often when a case was especially desperate He levelled all difficulties. If I asked a soul of Him, He never refused me, even though it might have cost me many sacrifices, many prayers, and much suffering. If He did not intend to use me for the good of one of the girls, He would not inspire me with confidence to plead for her in this way. But my hope in Him was never frustrated.

"In case, Father, you have not experienced this, do try it; the more impossible the conversion of a sinner seems, the more faith one must have in the Heart of Jesus. You will see that I tell the truth. One must also be prepared for much sacrifice and suffering. However, there should be no discouragement, even if after conversion, a soul falls back again into old habits. In the end Jesus will win out and will strengthen that weak soul. We must do violence to the Heart of Jesus with great faith in Him."<sup>46</sup>

Very often, when Maria spoke to her girls, she suggested that they help one another:

"Should you see among you a girl who is rebellious, as often happens, try immediately to pray to our Lady, reciting a *Memorare* or a *Sub tuum praesidium*. Then notice the change. I attribute improvement in the girls to our Blessed

Mother. How many times do I not recite the *Tota pulchra* es before the Blessed Sacrament!

"Have great faith in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, savor the hymns that honor Him there, such as the *Pange Lingua*. Through that hymn I have obtained many graces for those girls who left much to be desired. My favorite devotions are to the Blessed Sacrament and our Lady."<sup>47</sup>

Often her lively temperament, which was also creative, helped her resolve a difficult situation. One morning she found the girls too quiet. She sensed that this was not normal. All of a sudden she threw her breviary, which she had in her hand, into the middle of the room. All heads raised up, and Sister Maria's laugh broke the tension.<sup>48</sup>

When she was named director, some persons were surprised and some of the older Sisters were a bit disappointed that this young sister had been preferred above others for such an important responsibility. But the superior had made a wise choice. The daughter of nobility, avoiding all allusion to her past life, created among her girls an atmosphere of great delicacy, gentleness, serenity, and joy. And she did much. She gave religious instructions and lessons in ethics, and also taught grammar, literature, and singing. In a short period of time she succeeded in forming a relationship of friendship with the girls. They loved her as she loved them, for to her they were 'my treasures' and they loved her as a mother.

In the winter of 1892-93, Maria was obliged to go to bed because of weakness in breathing. From the infirmary she wrote letters to the girls, expressing what was in her heart.

"My dear children, how are you? Are you good, obedient, industrious, and happy? I hope so. And how calm are you? Each of you passes before my mind as I say this to each one.

"Now, I expect a nice 'thank you' in return. I repeat and I remind you for your consolation that our Lord is so good! That is always my refrain. . . "49

### *A presentiment*

In religious life some decisions about individual religious can be occasioned by quite ordinary events. So it was, that in 1893, Sister Langsberg, superior of the Good Shepherd of Barcelona and later provincial superior of the convents in Spain and Portugal, visited Munster. She was a native of Munster and on her way to her home city had stopped at the Motherhouse in Angers, France. In Munster she observed the young Maria Droste closely because she had a special interest in her, having been a childhood friend of Countess Helen. In the archives of the Droste family is this letter from Sister Langsberg to the Countess:

"My dear Helen. I don't know how to tell you how moved I was when I saw your dear daughter. I was able to observe her closely and I cannot cease thanking God for the exceptional graces He has granted her, but they are graces which cost much. Such privileged ones must be crucified with the Lord and must know how to die on the cross. This dear sister must also suffer a great deal for she is destined for great holiness. Yes, I have no doubt, the Lord has particular designs on your dear child. He leads her by a narrow road and it is He Himself who wants to be her guide. Here is a soul that is not understood by everybody. The spiritual abandonment in which she finds herself is no small cross. I would love to have her with me to inspire and counsel me in my difficulties because she is far more advanced in virtue than I am."<sup>50</sup>

Sister Langsberg may have played a part in Sister Droste's finally going to Portugal. But Maria herself had a vague premonition of her future transfer. She recalled this in minute detail around the subject of Max's marriage:

"When he brought me news of his approaching wedding, the idea came immediately to me now my mission is finished here; Max does not need me any longer; Our Lord will send me elsewhere. And so it was. Max was married October 4, 1893, and on January 24, 1894, I left for Portugal. "<sup>51</sup>

God's way is His own. Human events and circumstances are arranged by Him to accomplish His plans. Of this Maria was convinced.

"My Divine Spouse, who wanted me all for Himself without reserve and who wanted to be my only satisfaction and consolation, took from me little by little all that could lead to human consolation."<sup>52</sup>

*You will go to Lisbon!*

In her notes following her retreat of 1891, Maria wrote:

"The crucifix I received at my profession is my comfort. I kiss it now with all the love of my heart, and I am ready to live and die on the cross. I understand well the sacrifice I am making, but in this sacrifice the good God has permitted that I find peace. Is this not clear proof that He has accepted the offering of myself which I made to Him on the day of my profession? On that occasion our Lord offered me the cross and invited me to give all to Him without any reservation. I abandoned myself to Him and to suffering. Now my anguish has reached a peak, but I thank You, O my Jesus! I am all Yours, and You are all mine. I desire but You alone."<sup>53</sup>

Maria's unconditional fidelity to her religious profession was a constant support to her in accomplishing her office as director. The responsibilities of her work caused her spiritual suffering not because of doubts about her Good Shepherd vocation such as she had experienced as a novice, but because her attraction for prayer conflicted with her duties. An urge, such as hers, to be

less involved in exterior works can be realized in the Good Shepherd Congregation where many religious are called to a life of prayer in order to sustain the community's exterior apostolate.<sup>54</sup>

But now, just as had happened before, she heard within her the voice of her Lord. It was the feast of the Epiphany, 1894.

"Live in My love and in union with Me-in fervent prayer and recollection-with the inner glance of your soul fixed on Me. Let Me do with you as I want so that I may accomplish My plan in you. I want to suffer in you; and I want to be formed and glorified by you in souls. Make My loveableness shine in the hearts of others."<sup>55</sup>

What did the Lord want of her?

Simultaneously during the octave of the Epiphany at the Motherhouse in Angers, several changes of superiors and assistants were being considered. On January 19, 1894, a letter from Angers arrived in Munster and was opened by the provincial, Sister M. Agnes Nacke. After reading it, her heart could cry out, "Oh, my God! What a sacrifice! Sister Maria Droste to be assistant in Lisbon! Is this possible?"

The feast of the provincial was observed on the 21st. For the occasion Maria had helped prepare a program. Her voice could be heard above the rest, singing:

"You can send us on mission, even right now  
to the north, to the south,  
to the east and to the west

Far from our dear Munster.

Do not be afraid, dear Mother, your daughters will be faithful forever."

At this point the provincial interrupted the program and before

the community announced that the superior general was requesting Sister Maria of the Divine Heart for the convent in Lisbon. She would leave in three days.<sup>56</sup>

Maria's presentiment had become reality. In three days she would leave for Portugal. At that time the superior in Lisbon was another religious from Westphalia, the former Baroness von Schorlemer. As there was an administrative connection between the convents of Spain and Portugal, it is possible that the superior of Barcelona, Sister Landsberg, had asked the general for this daughter of the Droste zu Vischerings to help in Portugal.

The change included the possibility that Portugal's mild climate would benefit Maria's health, but she did not need this mitigating circumstance for her acceptance of what was asked of her. In her heart she knew well that the cross was waiting. Clear in their meaning were the recent words of her Spouse,

"Let Me do with you as I want."



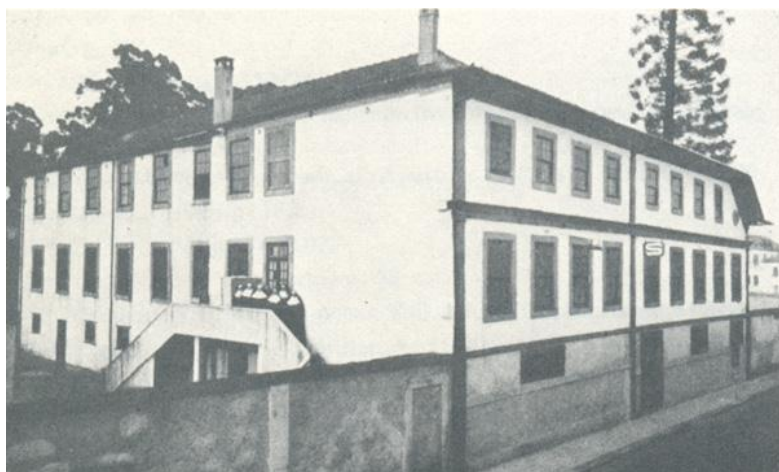
### Footnotes - CHAPTER III

1. Investigation process of Munster, p. 543.
2. Apostolic process of Munster, p. 94 f.
3. Chasle, Abbe Louis. *Sister Mary of the Divine Heart*. London: Burns & Oates, Ltd., 1907. p. 67.
4. Kerdreux, Michel de. *Comme Une Flamme*, Casterman: Editions Salvator, Mulhouse, 1968, p. 110.
5. *Autobiography* of Maria Droste zu Vischering. Unpublished, p. 238.
6. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 291 f.
7. *Ibid*, p. 292 f.
8. *Autobiography*, p. 239.
9. *Ibid*, p. 239 f.
10. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
11. *Ibid*, p. 114.
12. *Ibid*, p. 114.
13. *Ibid*, p. 115.
14. *Autobiography*, p. 240.
15. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
16. *Autobiography*, pp. 240-241.
17. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
18. *Ibid*, p. 121.
19. Apostolic process of Oporto, p. 71.
20. *Ibid*, p. 72.
21. *Autobiography*, p. 248.
22. *Ibid*, p. 250.
23. *Ibid*, p. 246 f.
24. *Ibid*, p. 243-245.
25. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
26. *Ibid*, p. 123.
27. *Autobiography*, p. 245.
28. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.
29. Chasle, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.
30. *Ibid*, pp. 98-100.
31. *Ibid*, p. 101.
32. *Autobiography*, pp. 250-251.

33. Testimony of Sister Agnes Nacke in Investigation Process of Munster, p. 551.
34. Baroness Antonia von Wendt. cf. Apostolic process of Munster, p. 80.
35. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
36. Chasle, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.
37. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 72.
38. c.f. Ordinary Process of Oporto; and Apostolic process of Munster.
39. Investigation process of Munster, p. 559.
40. Apostolic process of Munster, p. 106 f.
41. *Ibid*, p. 82.
42. Cf. p. 64, Chapter III.
43. Diary of July 31, 1891. Ct. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
44. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
45. Apostolic process of Munster, p. 97.
46. *Autobiography*, p. 243 f.
47. Chasle, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.
48. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
49. *Ibid*, p. 136.
50. *Ibid*, p. 137.
51. *Autobiography*, p. 246.
52. *Ibid*, p. 247.
53. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
54. Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, revised according to the documents of Vatican Council II and Post Conciliar Pontifical Documents, by the special general chapter of 1969. Constitution No. 1.
55. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
56. *Ibid*, pp. 139-140.



*View of the city of Porto*



*Convent of the Good Shepherd at Oporto in Maria's time*

## Chapter IV

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD OF OPORTO

(1894-1899)

Five years of life remained to Maria when she left Munster for Portugal on January 24, 1894. These last five years, more than any other period of her life, were to reflect her character; her ability for government; her habitual manner of acting when immersed in innumerable difficulties; her acceptance and consummation of her holocaust; her response to her mission in the Church; her death.

There is ample documentation for these years provided by the canonical processes leading to her beatification and by the copious records concerning her in various archives. The very abundance and richness of these notes gives rise to a problem in reconstructing her life story. Yet, once attempted, a synthesis of all this verifies that the burning lamp which had remained prior to 1894, as it were, 'under a bushel' in the cloister of the Good Shepherd of Munster, once raised on the candlestick of a poor mission in Portugal shed such light and holiness as to be a signal beam to the Church and the entire human race of the power of Christ's love.

#### *From Munster to Lisbon*

The journey absorbed an entire month, from January 24 to February 24, 1894. In spite of her resolve to carry out bravely the obedience which called her into an exile far from those she loved, Maria had to bow to her strong emotions. When she said goodbye to the Good Shepherd Sisters and girls at Munster, she felt her limbs tremble. The immediate separation from her parents was less painful because the Count and Countess intended to accompany her to Angers where the Superior General had asked her to stop enroute to Lisbon.

The first break in the journey was at Cologne. Here, after a visit to the cathedral and to the Cardinal, a friend of the Count, they remained the night in the Good Shepherd Convent. For Maria, that first night far away from Munster was a sleepless one. Her diary notes:

"I believed that I was losing courage. I was on the verge of abandoning everything and returning to Munster. But this was only for a moment. I repeated to myself: how many times did I not force the devil to retreat when he was tormenting my girls? And now should he win out over me? I renewed my sacrifice, trusting in the prayers of my dear girls."<sup>1</sup>

The journey continued from Cologne to Paris. First, they went to the shrine of Our Lady of Victory at the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Afterwards, in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Montmartre, Maria experienced a ray of comforting light. Kneeling in adoration before Jesus in the Eucharist, exposed in the ostensorium which was in the form of a cross, she felt even more deeply the conviction that devotion to the Heart of Jesus is intimately connected with Eucharistic adoration.<sup>2</sup>

They reached Angers January 27. Here awaited her the joy of praying at the tomb of her holy Foundress and meeting her Superior General, Sister Marine Verger, who had been trained by Mother Pelletier herself. But here she had to face the pain of separation from her parents. On January 28 she wrote to the Novice Mistress at Munster:

"I find myself quite at home with Mother General. She reminds me of Mother Lambert who is certainly helping from Heaven. Here Mother Lambert is spoken about a lot. Even Mother General told me that if she had not died she would have been elected Superior General."<sup>3</sup>

The next day, the 29th, another letter to the same religious had a different tone:

"My heart is torn, but the thought of doing the will of God and the realization of your prayers are my strength. Today, January 29, is the anniversary of my profession. Please do pray much for me. May God's will be our strength and our joy."<sup>4</sup>

In the company of two other sisters, the journey continued from Angers to Perpignon and from there to Barcelona. While at Barcelona it was possible to take a side-trip to Manresa.

At the grotto where Saint Ignatius had written his Spiritual Exercises, Maria was again favored by a communication from the Lord. While praying she heard an inner voice asking if she was prepared to sacrifice herself in order to save a house of the Good Shepherd which was in great danger. This was asked of her three times.<sup>5</sup>

Her stop at Manresa gave her new courage. She notes in her diary:

"Leaving Munster everything was dark and cloudy. I had no other light than a conviction of being in the hands of God and accomplishing His will. My new mission was very repugnant to my nature. But now my feeling is that God is so good and we realize this when we seek only Him."<sup>6</sup>

At this time there was no Good Shepherd Convent in Madrid and so when the little group arrived in that city they knocked at the door of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Here, Maria was welcomed by the superior, who had been her mother's schoolmate at the Sacred Heart boarding school in Blummental. The superior wrote to Countess Helen:

"I cannot describe how much I am drawn to Maria. How simple she is, candid, mature and profoundly pious. She is one of those precious pearls one rarely finds."<sup>7</sup>

From Madrid they went directly to Oporto. Here they found the superior of the Libson community. She had, until recently, been assistant and was being replaced in that capacity by Maria.

The embrace of these two sisters marked the beginning of a relationship characterized by mutual understanding.

The travelers rested a week in Oporto and took advantage of the interval for some practice with the Portuguese language. Maria's impression of this house was a sad one, for it was in a disastrous condition both morally and materially. With her usual frankness she wrote the Superior General:

"As for the poor house of Oporto, each one of us must contribute generously our prayer and sacrifices so that God's blessing may descend upon this house, so sorely tried. The new superior will have much to suffer before all can be put in order again."<sup>8</sup>

Finally on February 24, accompanied by the superior, she set foot within the Good Shepherd of Lisbon.<sup>9</sup>

#### *A t Lisbon*

Sister Maria Droste remained at the Good Shepherd of Lisbon from February 24 until May 14, 1894. The witnesses of the process limit their testimony about these months to simply confirming that she was assistant to the superior and director of the services to the girls. There were about sixty girls, not extremely aggressive but inclined to lack ambition and to be rude and coarse. One of these at one time, more from poor manners than from meanness, threw dirt on Maria's face, veil and guimpe. It is easy to imagine what it must have cost her to adapt, she, so well educated and so selfless in her love of others, finding herself in the midst of these Latin temperaments. Her Benedictine cousin, Father Augustine von Galen, was to say:

"It is no wonder that these Portuguese girls with their instability and apathy tried the patience even of Maria, with her strong character, a character like the oak trees of our Westphalia."<sup>10</sup>

However, Maria was beginning to understand these poor girls. In her humility, she attributed to her ignorance of the Portuguese language her inability to effect change among them, as she had seen happen with the girls at the Good Shepherd of

Munster. From a letter to her uncle, Bishop von Galen, we learn :

"It pains me not to be able to give lessons to the girls, for this was my delight at Munster. To limit my duties, which are part of my responsibility here, is really hard for me. The superior has brought me a huge grammar and willingly would I throw it into the fire. But I have no alternative to applying myself diligently, as I used to do in learning Latin."<sup>11</sup>

The few words of Portuguese which she knew she pronounced badly, much to the merriment of the girls. In the same letter to her uncle she continued:

"I am always happy when there is occasion to laugh a little with the girls, and I take advantage of the opportunity. But, at the same time, I suffer interiorly in trying to remain calm and united to God in the midst of all the noise, so that I can be gay and joyful. This intimate union with God is enough to keep me continually calm."

When Abbe Chasle, author of the first full-length biography of Maria, visited Lisbon, he learned that she had been charged with the direction of the choir. This meant that she could exercise her zeal in seeing that the liturgical feasts were observed according to the rubrics. She had arrived in Lisbon during the second week of Lent and was surprised to learn that the community had never had the liturgical functions of Holy Week. She spoke of this to the



superior and offered to prepare the singing and the ceremonies. This entailed hard and intense work but it was more than rewarded when, to her deep satisfaction, she succeeded in arranging a day and night of reparation to Jesus exposed in the Blessed Sacrament for Holy Thursday.<sup>12</sup>

The superior was very happy. Sister Maria was everywhere. Besides her duties as assistant and director of the girls' section, she also worked competently as secretary, bursar, singing teacher, assistant with guests-enabling her to relate to outsiders-and even at times in the dining room arranging tables before and after meals.

After Maria had been in Lisbon about three months the superior was able to report to the Motherhouse:

"Sister Maria is a very strong soul. Her first fervor has not become tepid. She is a model of tender piety, of ardent zeal in the service of God and for the good of souls. She is a stimulus to us to seek in every way whatever would be more pleasing to our Lord, and so she motivates us toward greater religious perfection. She always chooses for herself that which is most difficult and heavy, and is very happy if she can lighten my burden as superior."<sup>13</sup>

On May 12, Pentecost, a telegram arrived at Lisbon from Angers:

"Sister Maria Droste is hereby appointed superior of the house of Oporto. "

After this appointment, Sister Anna de Schorlemer, superior, wrote her friend Countess Helen:

"For us in Lisbon this blow was an extremely heavy one. A few allusions made by our Superior General in recent letters caused me to think that something was in the wind, but we had never taken it seriously. When asked, I had to answer conscientiously, without being influenced by my

personal feelings. You cannot imagine how this has cost me because God alone knows how much we understand one another and how similar are our views,"<sup>14</sup>

Maria wrote her father:

"Pray for me. I find this decision very hard. I cannot explain it. Tomorrow evening we leave Lisbon and will arrive at Oporto the next morning. The superior and I are stunned since the arrival of the telegram. However there is reason for comfort: it came the night of Pentecost."

And to her mother:

"I do not have the courage to describe what I think. The only thing that gives me courage is the realization that this responsibility is given me through obedience and that I am in the hands of God. I feel incapable, and I await all help only from Him. Do go to the tomb of our little Tonia and ask our little sister to procure from our Lord the grace that I may be able to work for His glory."<sup>15</sup>

The house of the Good Shepherd of Oporto had been founded through the instrumentality of Dom Luigi Rua and through the generosity of a noted benefactress, still living when Maria went there as superior. In spite of Dom Rua's zeal and the benefactress' generosity, the foundation had not proceeded well. The property had been purchased in a dilapidated condition and was heavily taxed. And yet, the "White Sisters" were badly needed in Oporto because of the moral degradation of the city, especially in the working areas. Although Oporto was known as "the City of the Virgin" and took pride in its annual solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament for the feast of Corpus Christi, it was hardly Christian.

The house of the Good Shepherd was located in the northern end of the city, a section where the working class lived, interspersed with random groups of all descriptions. For this reason,

the Good Shepherd found itself in a missionary milieu. The general government of the order had been conscious of this fact, for the first superior appointed there had been Sister Francis Xavier FitzPatrick, an authentic missionary, one of the foundresses of a mission in Chile and who had also served in the United States.

When Sister Droste arrived, the house was very modest and its only financial value was in its location on a vast stretch of land with good prospects for future development.

A new superior had been appointed for this community shortly before Maria's arrival in Portugal in February. This superior was a gifted person with much promise but apparently she had lacked prudence. She had thrown herself right into the moral and financial problems of the house but within three months the situation was more serious and confused than before. Insubordination and a lack of discipline reigned within the house and there were numerous debts outside. The administration of the place was hampered by interference from Dom Rua.<sup>16</sup> The number of creditors could not be counted and the house was on the verge of financial collapse. At the time there were 78 girls in residence and about 20 sisters.<sup>17</sup> They lived frugally on donations from so-called patrons, but were without any help or subsidy from authorities and agencies.

Here, Sister Maria arrived, the morning of May 15, 1894, and here she was to live out the years before her death in 1899. In this house she was to witness to sanctity. Her years at the Good Shepherd of Oporto might be likened to two years of public, apostolic life during which she was daily teaching and administering, followed by three years of a slow, mysterious Calvary. But all were for the salvation of souls.

### *In her atmosphere*

How Maria faced the difficult situation of the Good Shepherd of Oporto can be gleaned from the following letter to her mother:

"Although I loved Lisbon and was very happy and contented there, I did not find enough scope for my energy. It is a beautiful place for a rest and for recovering one's strength but if I had to stay there a long time I would have been like a fish out of water.

"Here in the midst of a sea of difficulties I feel more at home. There are innumerable sacrifices here-such as the work and the continual renouncement-but I am in my own atmosphere, as it were.

"I am absolutely convinced that I am where God wants me to be and in my heart there is profound peace, even though I am in the midst of many problems.

"This poor house has been neglected for a long time, both from within and from without, and you cannot imagine how hard it is to put it back into order again, to reorganise the property and to revive a true religious spirit. Only God can help and sustain me in this task,

"In compensation, my room is by the chapel and the door has a little window which permits me to see the altar. I have never before lived so close to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament."<sup>18</sup>

Father Placid Spee, her Benedictine cousin, confirmed Maria's energetic and courageous attitude:

"It was a known fact in our family that she showed the virtue of fortitude with exceptional energy. On one occasion, speaking of the missions, she had said, 'Oh, I wish I were a boy!' Later, when she was superior in Oporto, she used this expression: 'I am happy that I am a woman in order to be able to demonstrate to the Portuguese of what a woman is capable.'<sup>19</sup>

## *Enthronement of the Sacred Heart*

Maria's first act after her arrival at the Good Shepherd of Oporto was to enthrone there the Heart of Jesus, consecrating the community to Him and initiating practices of devotion honoring His Heart. Mrs. Maria Girolma Ribeiro, daughter of the benefactress who had in 1881 contributed to the foundation of the house, had also been educated by the Religious of the Sacred Heart at Reidenburg. She was a long-time acquaintance and frequent visitor of Maria and provided much information for the process. She attests:

"As soon as Maria arrived she had a statue of the Sacred Heart enthroned in the chapel and promoted this devotion among the sisters, students, and others. She said that the First Fridays of the month and other days consecrated to the Sacred Heart should be considered feast days. She also taught hymns of praise in honor of the Sacred Heart, and in these her voice dominated all the others."<sup>20</sup>

The chapel however was very poor. The altar was miserable; the tabernacle a portable urn; and the flowers artificial. Maria had recourse to her brother William, who responded with a cash gift which permitted her to procure a new altar and tabernacle. Instead of artificial flowers she saw that the most beautiful flowers from the garden were placed in the chapel daily. According to the witness of Sister Angela Gartmann:

"Sister Maria, who lent herself to all kinds of work, sometimes even to laying bricks, so developed the cultivation of flowers that we could sell them to help maintain the community. Every morning, however, quite early, before the flowers would be cut for market, she would go down to the garden and pick the most beautiful roses for the Blessed Sacrament."<sup>21</sup>

From the testimony of Sister Angela Stallmeier, who lived in the Good Shepherd of Oporto from October, 1894, until Maria's

death, we know:

"From the beginning of her work in Oporto, she stressed devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the solemn celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi. She had thirty-three small banners painted with invocations of the litany of the Sacred Heart, and twelve with the promises of the Sacred Heart to Margaret Mary Alacoque. For the First Fridays of each month she introduced all-day adoration, and also during the entire octave of Corpus Christi."<sup>22</sup>

Sister Maria knew well that every religious community nourishes its spirit at the foot of the altar. Therefore at Oporto as at Lisbon she organized the celebration of the solemnities of Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart, Christmas and feasts of Our Lady. All was planned to correspond with the strong liturgical emphasis in the Congregation of the Good Shepherd and with the manner of celebrating these feasts in the other convents of the Order.

### *Renewing the Religious Community*

Reverend Theophile Cohelo Vieira, deacon of the Cathedral of Oporto, testifies:

"A pope has said 'Give me a religious man or woman who perfectly observes the rule and I will immediately canonise him or her.' According to this viewpoint and considering how extraordinary is a vocation to the Good Shepherd, I declare that Sister Maria was a saintly religious."<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, it is easy to understand that Maria did not tolerate half-measures or compromises or, even less, abuse in the observance of the rule of the Institute. In one of her reports to her provincial superior, she affirms:

"Personally I cannot complain of my sisters. They try to improve according to the capacity of each in order to

please and help me. I well understand that they need a lot of encouragement because of all that happened here before my arrival."<sup>24</sup>

Her encouragement was not only in words or by persuasion, but mainly by example. Dom Augustine von Galen, her Benedictine cousin, affirms:

"One found her everywhere, peeling vegetables, cleaning the kitchen, in the sewing rooms, intent on cleaning the house, pulling weeds in the garden, planting vegetables and flowers. In doing these things she drew along with her the other sisters. She helped in everything. Because there was no assistant superior in the house, she personally took upon herself the surveillance and instruction of the girls."<sup>25</sup>

To her own sisters in Munster she wrote:

"My greatest happiness is when I have a little time for recollection or for reading, but these occasions are very rare. Thanks be to God it is possible for me to be united to Him interiorly. I am strengthened by the thought that God is found everywhere according to the measure in which we try to accomplish His will. In spite of everything I am happy because I am all His and He is all mine."<sup>26</sup>

The healing activity of Sister Droste while she was superior in Oporto is summarized in the canonical process in 1942 by two sisters who long outlived her. First, Sister Mary Stephen:

"I knew Sister Maria Droste when she arrived in Oporto for I was at that time a child-care aide. As soon as she began to work I could see that she was extraordinarily good and virtuous and that she possessed superior qualities of spirit and of heart and that she was naturally and supernaturally gifted. She instinctively drew us. She led us to God whom she loved without measure. One could notice that she lived constantly in the presence of God. . .

"She carried on her work and suffered every sacrifice for love of God, tirelessly exhorting us to do the same... She made herself all things to all, to save all, like the Apostle.

"Our superior, in the true sense of the word, never thought, never acted except for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Her zeal for our advancement in religious perfection was unfailing.

"She could not admit mediocrity, much less stupidity. In the beginning she seemed a little severe because she desired that we would be perfect religious. It was evident that she could not abide taking half-measures with the good God.

"Her temperance and mortification were extreme. Everything offered her was too much for her, but with us she was tender and affectionate, and her generosity was even excessive.

"She governed the house with such prudence, firmness and justice that it was evident that the good God helped her in everything-that He was caring along with her-active, organizing, provident. In very little time we came out of our grave situation. What can I say of her humility which was so profound, of her obedience, of her charity, of her poverty when she could have had all possible comforts of this world? Of her abnegation, of her patience in the midst of such great suffering which can be called a real martyrdom?

"She was happy because she was united to our Lord, to His Heart, without ever letting us know that she was so privileged by God. However, it was quite apparent to us that she was and we perceived that she was visibly assisted by Him."<sup>27</sup>



No less eloquent is the testimony of Sister Rodriguez, a lay sister:

"It was I who opened the door to her when she arrived May 15, 1894. I have always remained in Oporto up until the day of our expulsion in 1910, and I assisted at her death.

"When she arrived, the house was in a miserable condition but very soon, though remaining poor, we lacked nothing necessary. Her faith and her trust in God were so great that she obtained all that was needed for the girls. We felt that was something extraordinary.

"Although she was from a noble family she was very humble and simple. She loved the poorest and the most needy of the children. In order to show us her solicitude she put her hand to everything. She would help the sister in the garden to dig; she would go to the kitchen and peel the vegetables; she would help prepare the meals. She was good to everybody and we had proof of this because no matter what hour we might need her, she was always available.

"Her great solicitude led her to desire to be useful to us sisters and to the girls. We understood all too well that she wanted us to love the good God with all our strength. She spoke to us often of the Sacred Heart, of the love of Jesus for us. Oh! how she loved Him! I can never forget her attitude in the chapel. Her face showed that she was speaking with the good God, that she was in an attitude of listening. One could almost say that she saw Him.

"It has been said that she was severe, and this is true, because she wanted the rule to be observed to perfection, always giving the example in spite of her ill health. She was very mortified, but never expected us to imitate her in this. I do not know grand things, but I remember very well

that the house of Oporto became much better through her and that she did great good for us."<sup>28</sup>

One might wonder how the house of Oporto could have been in such a pitiable condition if Sister Maria in a short space of time made of it a "Good Shepherd" in the true sense of the word. Blessed Maximilian Kolbe would answer, "The apostolate, wherever and however it is undertaken, must redound to an increased love of God in our hearts. Souls are gained by example and on our knees through prayer."<sup>29</sup>

Maria never tired of enlightening and recommending to her sisters the necessity of an interior life. The seventh volume of her writings presented for the examination of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints contains her conferences to her sisters in Oporto.<sup>30</sup> Abbe Chasle has chosen a few of them, and these it would be helpful to read in order on the one hand to better understand Maria's spirituality and, on the other, to know the secret behind the transformation of the house of Oporto.

In the beginning of the year 1895, a year after her arrival in Oporto, she suggested to the sisters the following reflections:

"For us who should, according to our holy rule, unite the active and the contemplative life, it is important to know how, in the midst of our many occupations, to keep that interior spirit and that union with God which is our happiness and from which comes every perfection. It is not important what work we are doing, but how we are doing it, that is, that we learn how to sanctify all our work. We should ask ourselves often-is this the work that the good God has given me through obedience? Am I doing it as God would want me, that is, in the way our rule and superiors request? Am I working in the hours assigned to work, or am I continuing working without asking myself if obedience or the bell is calling me to another exercise? Am I striving to work only for God?

"Our contemplative life, that intimate relationship with our Divine Master, must be as the very 'bone-marrow' of our active life. Believe me, dear Sisters, we can lead a life of work and of exterior occupation and at the same time be quite united to God, who is always in our heart, where we find Him always if we but enter into ourselves. Let us get into the habit of making our heart a little cell where the world cannot enter and where we find the Lover of our souls. Let us offer Him our pain, our tribulations, our fatigue. Let us share with Him what preoccupies us, what saddens us, what gives us joy. Jesus desires that we treat with Him as would a child with its father. The greater our confidence in Him the greater will be His love for us. Let us make frequent acts of faith, hope, and love, which augment grace in us and fortify the life of our souls.

"In all exterior things, even the most indifferent, let us never lose sight of Jesus, who will say to us as He did to St. Catherine, 'Think of Me and I will think of you.' . . . He will think of us in the measure in which we forget ourselves to think only of Him. If we remember that He thinks of us, we will have nothing to fear and we will be happy even in the greatest difficulties?

For the feast of the Assumption she returned to the same line of thought.

"In order to be united to God, it is not necessary to say long prayers and to leave our usual occupations. A thought, a simple look to this God who dwells in us is enough to maintain this union. Of course the hours of prayer are the most favorable to inflame us with this divine love. In a special way at the foot of the altar will we find the Lover of our souls. A truly religious person, profoundly penetrated with the spirit of God, will always desire to take to Jesus in the tabernacle the tribute of her adoration and of her activity. But when our rule imposes other duties on us, we must not leave the mystical temple within us, for we

can maintain solitude of heart even in the midst of the most unlikely occupations, even when in contact with people outside when this is required by our office. Saint Teresa used to say, 'When speaking to other people remember that Jesus is in you. While your ears are intent on listening to creatures, put your mind on the interior voice of your Divine Guest who delights to dwell in us. When your eyes are obliged to attend to created things, remember there is an Uncreated Goodness that surpasses all created goodness, and habituate yourselves to contemplate this goodness with the eyes of your souls.'

"Some of you might say that the interior life is too difficult and can be practised only by the saints but if we reflect seriously on what it consists of, we will see that it is easy and sweet; in fact that it is necessary. "<sup>32</sup>

### *In You, O Lord, Have I Hoped*

"In You, O Lord, have I hoped." This verse from Psalm 25 was enscribed on the main entrance to the castle of Darfeld. At Oporto, Sister Maria made it her motto. Sister Angela Stallmeier, speaking of Maria's confidence in Divine Providence, tells us:

"She had an exceptional trust in God, particularly in all the questions which pertained to the economic difficulties of our house. Saint Joseph was her advocate. This trust exacted from her and from all her sisters a relationship with God free of defect, in which there would be no compromise or half-measures with Him."<sup>33</sup>

Abbe Chasle records this event:

"Her trust in Providence was rewarded by visible signs of heavenly assistance. In August of 1894 she was expecting an offering of 20,000 reis (the Portuguese monetary unit of the time). She prayed to Saint Joseph and to Saint Dominic to double this amount and she received

80,000 reis. A few weeks later she and her sisters made a novena to Saint Joseph, and on the eighth day of the novena a lady, who wished to remain unknown, sent her an envelope marked 'from Saint Joseph.' It contained 15,000 reis, and on the following day she received another gift of 1,000 reis. All these gifts helped pay the urgent debts as well as the customs duty on a statue of Saint Joseph sent her from Germany that very day. These occurrences were repeated many times and verified by what she wrote a few months after her arrival in Oporto: 'I cannot explain the continual and visible help of Divine Providence. Our intake (of girls) is now greatly increased,...and yet nothing is wanting to us. I think the good God often multiplies our provisions without our even noticing it because I don't buy any more than what I bought in the beginning."<sup>34</sup>

Abbe Chasle reports:

"Sister Maria desired that the number of persons cared for be increased, for she saw in the arrival of each new lamb or sheep a blessing and a new claim to the care of Divine Providence.

"The girls,' she wrote, 'are our only happiness. I would die of sorrow if I had to refuse even one. Nothing could shorten my life so much as to be restricted in what regards the salvation of soul The supernatural must not be measured by the natural. If this were done, nothing could be gained for the vineyard of the Lord. Our rule is our main help. When we observe it, everything falls into place for us, even our finances.'

"Within a few months after her arrival, the number of young people under care rose from 78 to 100. Sister Maria wanted 101, so that if for one reason or another one would be missing, there would always be the scriptural 100.

"On the feast of the Presentation in 1894 she said to her sisters, 'Our Lady will today complete the number I desire!' The evening arrived, and while the sisters were on their way to the chapel for the night office, the door bell rang. The religious looked at one another, and Sister Maria went to the parlor. It was the hundreth-and-one sheep that she had been requesting.

"In time, the number rose to 137 and the house became crowded. On the 4th of November, 1895, she wrote to a Benedictine priest, The dear child may come whenever she wants, but where we can put her only the guardian Angels know because we haven't a single vacancy. I am happy at the thought that through you the Good Shepherd is bringing to us the 137th child. (The house had never contained so many.) We are already thinking of all the pain she will cause us to suffer and we are offering it all for your intentions and for your abbey. I like to do this because it unites different orders and helps us realize that we belong to the *Catholic* Church and to the communion of saints.' "<sup>35</sup>

In order to be able to care for an ever greater number of girls, in the spring of 1895, Maria prepared a new section, which she named after the Holy Heart of Mary. She did this by adapting an old, dilapidated building which was in the middle of the convent grounds. The new arrangement made possible some division in ages among the girls. In the newly prepared section would be housed the children under fourteen years of age who had been exposed to suffering before coming to the Good Shepherd.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the scarcity of money, Sister Maria may well have conceived the idea of this new wing after a conversation with Father Francis Pereira Cabral, who often preached retreats and gave conferences to the religious and the girls. He later testified:

"I was invited to give a talk to the girls. I noticed in the front row three or four young children while the others were

older. After the talk, I expressed to the superior my surprise in finding children of eleven or twelve among twenty-year-olds. Sister Maria pointed one out to me and said, 'Do you see that little one? Yet, there is reason for her being in the midst of the older ones. Her mother, horrors!' exclaimed the holy superior with indignation, 'her mother . . . in exchange for a few coins ' She accentuated the word 'horrors' in such a way that I can hear her repeating it today."<sup>37</sup>

The section dedicated to the Heart of Mary became her favorite one. By this time she could speak Portuguese well and twice a day she went to visit these girls, either to teach them reading and writing or for catechism lessons. Many children at their entrance to the Good Shepherd did not even know how to make the Sign of the Cross.

In the year 1895 sixty of these young children were prepared by Maria for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation.<sup>38</sup>

### *The First Blessing of Leo XIII*

There is an incident in Maria's life known to us from research done in the archives of Darfeld Castle by Marcelle de Kerdreux. In June, 1895, while she was preparing for the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi at Oporto, she was at the same time following in thought and prayer a pilgrimage her parents were then making in Rome. Sometime before this she had enclosed in a letter to Darfeld a small note for the Pope: "If it is possible for you to have a private audience with the Holy Father, please give him this letter since I cannot be with you; that is, if it is possible."

Her elder sister Augusta described the joy of assisting at the Mass celebrated by the Pope in his private chapel and receiving Holy Communion from his hand. She continued:

"Leo XIII was then 85 years of age. He was slightly bent but very well. When seeing him one had a supernatural impression. Coming close to him, one realized he is a saint. He received us with much graciousness, just like a father, despite his majestic bearing and penetrating spirit. It is very edifying to assist at his Mass; he says it with a singular piety and expression of voice. The Mass was followed by another of thanksgiving, at which he assisted kneeling, immovable, with his face resting on his joined hands. He made a real picture of prayer and union with God. When one sees the Pope pray one cannot wonder any more about the source of his wisdom and of the success with which he governs the Church. One knows from where he gathers his strength.

"After the Mass we came close to him and he spoke with us for some time, and Elizabeth has said that she remembers that day very well."<sup>39</sup>

A little later the Pope granted a special audience to the Droste family. Of this Augusta said:

"We were all gathered around the Holy Father, five of us, making a semicircle around him, very, very close to him. He took my hand in his for the entire time, and he blessed us later, placing his hands upon the head of each one. As to Elizabeth, he caressed her and asked her name. Afterwards Mother asked him to bless her other children and her nephews, and gave him a letter written by her daughter in the convent."<sup>40</sup>

What was not Maria's joy when later she received an answer from the Pope through the "Maestro di Camera." Leo XIII told her he was pleased with her filial submission and homage, united with that of her parents themselves and he sent her his Apostolic Blessing, not only to her but to the entire community and upon the apostolic works of the house of Oporto.<sup>41</sup>



### *The Fire of Divine Love and Its Cover. . .*

As long as Sister Maria had remained in the midst of her family and in the Christian atmosphere of Darfeld and even more during the two years of her retirement before entering the Good Shepherd, she had had the guidance of a spiritual director: first, Father Hauser; and, after his death, Dom Boetel, parish priest of Darfeld.

Saint Vincent Ferrer wrote in his treatise on the spiritual life: "Jesus Christ will never give His grace, without which we can do nothing, to anyone who, having available a person capable of assisting and directing him, yet despises this help because he feels sufficient to himself and that he is capable of finding alone all that is necessary for his salvation."<sup>42</sup>

Leo XIII on January 22, 1899, affirmed clearly that spiritual direction has always been practiced by the saints and that it is presumptuous to reject this doctrine. "Those walking in the way of perfection are exposed to error, and more than others, they need a master and a guide."<sup>43</sup>

Sister Maria of the Divine Heart, because of the extraordinary in her life and also because of her natural temperament, would not have been able to grow in holiness without a wise spiritual director. It is good that she recognized this need. Hers was a practical, decisive, active and yet impulsive temperament, a temperament ordinarily proud and sure of itself and consequently disinclined to submission. But in her these tendencies were compensated by an extraordinary humility and a rare supernatural prudence. She placed herself under the direction and counsel of others and in doing so helped assure the exclusion of auto-suggestion and fantasy in her experience of divine communications, as well as guaranteeing a more sure growth in holiness.

Therefore, her suffering in not having spiritual direction after her entrance into the religious life is understandable. In lieu of a

priest director, she opened herself to her provincial, Sister Lambert, in whom she found help and wise counsel.

Often a confessor cannot take the place of a spiritual director, for not always is the capacity to administer the Sacrament of Penance combined with the gifts needed to direct certain souls, especially if these are favored by God with unusual spiritual gifts. In Portugal Maria experienced a further hindrance to spiritual direction. It was not that there were no priests capable of this but rather because in the beginning she could not express herself in Portuguese. Later, when she had acquired the language on a par with her English and French, she was able to write, not without a certain complacency, to her mother:

"Today I wrote four letters, one in French and the others in English, Portuguese and German."<sup>44</sup>

The Lord would later permit her to meet a wise director who would order her to write her autobiography. This she would do in Portuguese.

Toward the end of 1895, however, she was able to receive direction from Father Ildephonsus Schober, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Seckau in Austria. The Benedictines of the Congregation of Beuron, to whom Dom Schober belonged, had in 1894 opened a priory at an ancient abandoned abbey at Cucujacs, about five kilometers from Oporto.

Towards the autumn of 1895, Abbot Schober was sent to Cucujacs as a Visitor. This provided a precious occasion for the superior of the Good Shepherd of Oporto to invite him to preach a retreat for the sisters, for over half the community was German. This abbot was highly regarded by the community, especially by Sister Maria Droste, who found in him an able spiritual director. Actually, her talks with him were few because he was staying in Cucujacs but the absence of conversation was substituted by an ongoing correspondence, which continued even after his return to his abbey in Austria.

Letters from Maria to the abbot affirm that he used more than one method in his direction of her. At first, it seems, Dom Schober maintained a general stance of not attaching much importance to her divine communications, trying instead to ground her in humility, correcting her severely because of her temperament. Later, however, he took more into consideration the special characteristics of the spiritual gifts she had received and which he believed were authentic. He was vigilant that his directee correspond generously to the great graces the Lord was giving her.

Dom Girolamo Kiene, Benedictine of the priory of Cucujacs, attests:

"As to what regards her nature and character (of Sister Maria) we must note her wisdom, her capacity for business management, her goodness, and also, that she could display a certain severity. I once witnessed a conversation between her and Dom Schober. She told him how she had acted with some sisters who were not very obedient and faithful. On this occasion Dom Schober caused her to discern that she had been too severe and too hard. Sister Maria humbly accepted his observation and promised to act differently."<sup>45</sup>

A characteristic of the spiritual direction of Dom Schober was that he anchored Maria's contemplative soul in daily meditation on Sacred Scripture, especially on passages in the Eucharistic Liturgy and the Divine Office prescribed by the Constitutions of the Good Shepherd Sisters. It seems that this spirituality, characteristically Benedictine, suited well the spiritual makeup of Sister Maria. Her charisms were similar to those of Saint Gertrude, the great Benedictine mystic. Effects of Dom Schober's direction are reflected in a letter Maria wrote him on October 15, 1895:

"The psalms are becoming ever more precious to me and I find in them a means of moderating my overly

precipitous actions. With my character, it would be useless to wish to possess great calm immediately. But 'stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tu is Jerusalem' ('our feet were standing in your courts, Jerusalem', Psalm 122) has shown me the way.

"Fixing my soul on God, my eternal rest, resting on the Heart of my Divine Spouse as long as He permits this, fastening my gaze on Him, on His greatness, His sovereignty, and His mercy according to the different attractions which He gives me, I can control my temperament. Anything else is only a fine embellishment of divine love and unnecessary. Is this not so?

"I would still like clarification concerning a matter about which I spoke with you another time. I feel our Lord wants me to be completely detached. But, thanks to your advice, I realize I have not yet reached a point of balance in my detachment, especially with regard to the sisters. In this regard, I cannot tell you how much your visit helped me. Since then many things have become clear to me and I am very calm as a result. At first I thought I was obliged to an absolute detachment, just as if I had to keep everything at knifepoint so as not to take anything from the good God, if I had withdrawn from Him ever so little. This was always closing off my heart, and at the end, as I see now, I would have little by little acquired a false judgment and have made myself unbearable to others. I would like to explain to you how I understand these matters so that thus I may be preserved from fresh illusions.

"When water boils, steam rises freely into the air. If you put a cover over it, the water redescends in drops of vapor. This is what I have to do; that is, I must seek to inflame my heart evermore with the fire of divine love and let it be consumed for my Divine Spouse. During hours of prayer and recollection I can give free scope to my attractions, to my love, despising all that is earthly and detaching my

heart from all that is not of Him. But when the lid is put on, that is, when my occupations place me in relationship to other creatures, I must very slowly and tranquilly let loose all that I have gathered from my Divine Spouse and allow it to fall as drops of water, cooling water, on all those souls with whom I have contact in the course of the day."<sup>46</sup>

### *German Property*

On the facade of the Good Shepherd of Oporto, according to the witness of Baroness von Twickel who visited there in 1914, there was an inscription: "German Property."<sup>47</sup> This was placed there after Sister Maria Droste's death because of the revolutionary government at the beginning of the century. It helped at least to slow down the reacquisition of the property by the government.

But how and why did the buildings of the Good Shepherd become German property?

We have already seen that Providence had miraculously maintained the community and girls, whose numbers had doubled in the space of a few months. But there remained always the same old mortgage with a high rate of interest, which had been contracted when the house had been acquired. There were also all the debts made by the preceeding superior, as well as the cost of urgent repairs and of remodelling a delapidated building so that it could be put to better use.

From Maria's correspondence with her father we learn that almost every letter from the Count was accompanied by a German check. On the third of February, 1895, she wrote him:

"A thousand thanks, dear Father, for having heard my request and for enclosing 250 marks in your letter. Because of the growing number of girls we need to begin a second section. If you like, this money can serve for our remodelling."<sup>48</sup>

Donations from her father, her mother, her brothers and other relatives were repeated, and generous. Maria thanked them with notes which stimulated her parents to give even more.<sup>49</sup>

"On Holy Thursday (1895) we inaugurated the second section for the little ones. We consecrated it to the Holy Heart of Mary, and at the present moment there are 18 little ones there, the youngest of whom is four years old. She is the first little tot I have ever taught to make the Sign of the Cross."

In another letter later:

"We have a little one of four years. At first all she did was cry. Now she is at home and follows me like a little puppy, repeating that her name is 'Maria Bernadette of the superior.' "<sup>50</sup>

Towards the middle of 1895 Maria wrote her father:

"Next to our garden is a piece of land with two small houses. A buyer would like to have a cabaret and dance hall there. This would ruin our house because those two small buildings are very near our second section and the children would be able to see everything. We must do all we can to impede this purchase, and it seems to me there is no alternative to ourselves buying the two houses and land."<sup>51</sup>

The Count decided to buy the land and the two buildings and on the advice of the German Consul, who foresaw the approaching revolution, and with the permission of the Superior General, he did so in his own name. Thus title to the property was in the name of "Count Clement Droste zu Vischering" but given for the use of the sisters. The latter called it the "Field of Providence."<sup>52</sup> This marked the beginning of a series of financial operations which resulted in stabilizing the Good Shepherd of Oporto.

Towards the end of 1895, much interest on high-percentage loans was due for payment and there were other debts contracted at nine percent. The Good Shepherd was further threatened by the anticlericalism which prevailed. If the debts were deferred, one protest of a creditor followed by legal procedure would have been enough to result in confiscation of the buildings and property and closing of the house.

Maria had a happy idea-to payoff all the creditors by contracting a single debt with one reliable and generous creditor. Who could this "reliable and generous creditor" be but her own father, the Count Droste zu Vischering? The German Consul was enthusiastic about the idea for it would have insured the protection of the Consulate on the whole work of the Good Shepherd of Oporto.

The Motherhouse in Angers was reluctant to give the necessary permission for this, for obvious reasons. But in the end, considering the reputation of the Droste family as "edifying, good, loving, simple, in a word saintly,"<sup>53</sup> and encouraged by the Cardinal Archbishop of Oporto, Americo Ferreiro dos Santos Silva, and by an appealing letter from Dom Schober, the Superior General conceded and gave permission. Maria had previously written her on November 20, 1895:

"It would be a tragedy if we were forced to close this house and send these young girls back to their former environments; only obedience could make me do this. My dear Mother, you know that I would rather die than lose even one of these young girls. Have we not suffered and sacrificed for them these last years? Therefore, thinking of the good of so many souls, I believe it is my duty to turn to you and then confidently await whatever happens. If the good God chooses to save us, He will know how to inspire you in Angers. If He wants the house to go into ruin, may His will be done."<sup>54</sup>

The Superior General answered by a telegram which arrived on December 22: "The contract is approved. You may proceed."<sup>55</sup> The contract was registered by the notary Thomas Megre Restier, Junior, January 14, 1896. The creditors were paid and Count Droste zu Vischering became the sole proprietor of the land and buildings of the Good Shepherd of Oporto, which automatically passed under the protection of the German Consulate.

When in 1910 the revolutionary army invaded the Good Shepherd of Oporto, they had to retreat because it was German property. The Count protested their assault through diplomatic channels to the Portuguese government, and these negotiations were not yet concluded when Europe became embroiled in the First World War.<sup>56</sup>

### 34 *Patches*

The ready availability of funds offered by her family for the convent of Oporto would seem to indicate that Maria never used these means, which came directly from Darfeld, for her personal benefit. Sister Angela Stallmeier, a member of the Oporto community from 1894, after having attested to Maria's victory over economic difficulties "because of her trust in God and her own energetic activity with the help of her parents and donations voluntarily sent her by various people,"<sup>57</sup> gives the following observation:

"Her poverty was heroic. I once counted 34 patches on her robe. At one time, without her knowing it, I replaced a worn-out sleeve in her habit, but I had to put it back again at her request. Her bedroom, which also served as her office, was very poor. She never allowed her nobility to weigh on us in any way."<sup>58</sup>

This patched habit of Maria's tells a story. It was an object of much comment at the Motherhouse, where she went in 1896.



"During her stay at Angers she sought by preference the last place and wore a very patched habit."<sup>59</sup>

Sister Angela Gartmann also witnesses to Maria's poverty:

"She wanted no exceptions and no favors different from others. When, because of her poor health she could not long remain standing, she was given a rug for her bedroom, something we would not ordinarily have. She immediately put it out of her room."<sup>60</sup>

The Good Shepherd convent in Oporto was in a peaceful location with a beautiful view. However, being on the outskirts of the city and almost in the country, it had many inconveniences such as lack of public services and of the use of some city facilities.

"We have to do something about all the rooms underground; they are humid and infested with rats. We must also channel the stagnant water. The humidity around the house is so terrible that we are all suffering from it and will suffer even more if something is not done about it."<sup>61</sup>

One can imagine therefore the mosquitoes which must have infested the area. Baroness Antonia, wife of her brother William, visited Oporto and noticed that the air was decidedly unhealthy. She later attested:

"During her illness, Maria refused a mosquito netting for her bed. In order to persuade her to accept one, I had to get a special permission for her from the Motherhouse."<sup>62</sup>

Maria could have chosen a life of material comfort. Her spirit of poverty might be compared with that of Saint Francis of Assisi, as Saint Bonaventure wrote of him: "No one ever desired riches as much as Francis desired poverty; nor was anyone more solicitous in keeping this treasure than was Francis."<sup>63</sup>

## *The Apostolate at the Parlor*

Maria exercised a special apostolate as superior. Her zeal for souls did not limit her to the young girls cared for by her community. As long as she was superior no one who wanted to see her was sent away and she used these contacts in the community parlor as opportunities to deepen the Christian life of those with whom she dealt.

Her apostolate with visitors was amazing in its scope. Notwithstanding her spiritual life, her union with God, her daily activities in directing the house, educating the girls, supervising the various sections-notwithstanding all of that-daily and many times during a day she was called to the parlor. Often benefactors came on matters concerning the finances of the house. On rare occasions the business experience of this thirty-year-old superior was challenged; however, always she gained respect and veneration.

One of her country women who had married in Portugal, Mrs. Caroline Michaelis de Vasconcellos, gives a picture of Maria when she met her:

"When I saw her for the first time she was walking slowly, dressed in her white habit with her arms crossed on her breast, her delicate hands hidden in the large sleeves of her religious garb. She was tall and had a noble bearing. One could readily perceive that she was a person used to commanding. She was grave and pale but neither sad nor severe in her manner. A beautiful smile shone on her peaceful face, a reflection of that candor and sweetness which drew all hearts to her. I should add that in her whole person one sensed an indescribable force of character."<sup>64</sup>

When Abbe Chasle wrote Maria's biography in 1906, he did not have at his disposal the material later gathered through the canonical processes. However, from information received orally he synthesized on one page what he learned about Maria's spirit,

and his synthesis later proved to conform in every detail to depositions given in the various processes.

"Her influence did not result in miraculous and instant changes in people, even though at times sinners experienced conversion of heart as soon as they entered her presence. She operated more by persuasion and individuals found themselves responding to her profound good sense. Her emphasis on faith and confidence in God, the expression on her face, her patience, her kind smile, the simplicity of her manner with little and humble persons, her goodness and the power which emanated from her person-all had such an influence that hearts felt themselves powerfully attracted to her and it was impossible to ignore her message. Some confided secrets to her; others shared with her that they had reached a point of desperation and were pushed to take extreme measures. The latter gave in after she encouraged them to moderation. All, penetrated by her depth, left her presence profoundly affected by her.

"Discovering often during the course of a conversation that the person or someone else was not on the right road, she would find a way to bring the person back to the Good Shepherd. By her work and her influence she became a powerful instrument of sanctification for many people of every age, sex, and condition, not excluding even priests, who came to her for light."<sup>65</sup>

A certain Maria Josephine Guismaraes Pestana Leao, who knew Maria well, attests:

"She impressed favorably all those who came near her, and she was instrumental in the conversion of many. I knew many girls and women who were converted after living with her. She had an extraordinary ability to bring about change in others. I remember a certain man who was very bad and had no faith. He went to the Good

Shepherd convent in very bad dispositions. After speaking with the superior, he was completely transformed and changed his way of life. The superior sought to help as much as possible and did all she could for the baptism of his children, who were already adults. She obtained work for them and I remember well that she led them to legitimize their marriages. This man's name was Felizardo de Lima and he was a member of a wild group of persons who threw stones at the windows of my parents' home because they were practicing Christians. Once he had need of something from me, and he came, telling me all that had happened to him at the Good Shepherd and he asked my pardon because he had thrown stones at my parents' home."<sup>66</sup>

A lady who had been a Catholic but who now had no faith came under Maria's influence. Maria succeeded in bringing her back to the practice of religion, helping her to become reinstated in the Church and even arranging her Confirmation. Another fact is told by the daughter of the founding benefactress of the Good Shepherd of Oporto:

"She seemed to have a gift for reading hearts. Once I heard her mention two persons from a good family whom she had seen a few times and who had been recommended to her prayers that they might be converted. She responded, 'One will die in the state of grace; the other. . . .' She was silent. Both of them died, the first a good death; the second, well, it is possible that he died well because God's mercy is infinite, but as far as could be perceived, he did not."<sup>67</sup>

A violent republican with extreme ideas even before the establishment of the republic needed to place his daughter in the Good Shepherd. Because he was well known for campaigning against religious, he did not have the courage personally to request his daughter's admission and instead did this through a third person. Sister Maria responded, 'Why does he not come to

‘speak to me personally?’ So, he did. At this time the superior was unable to walk and she received him in a little parlor in her wheelchair. At first, this man-the witness says she cannot reveal his name-began to speak violently, but in the end he fell on his knees and finished by kissing her hand respectfully.”<sup>68</sup>

A special aspect of her apostolate for the conversion of souls, affirms Sister Angela Stallmeier, was her solicitude for priests who were not true to their vocation.<sup>69</sup> The convent chaplain was asked by Sister Maria to give hospitality in his house which was near the convent to a certain priest who had been recommended to her because he had been living a life out of harmony with his priesthood. Don Alves, the chaplain, attests:

“He had been living a very irregular life but after two or three conversations with her-and I had accompanied him to the parlor for these-convicted by her reflections, her words, and her counsel, he was converted and returned to his full priestly duties. I myself saw him after Sister Maria’s death celebrate Mass in the convent chapel in gratitude for all she had done for him.”<sup>70</sup>

The spiritual formation of priests was one of her gravest concerns in Portugal. A good part of her apostolate in the parlor was directed towards them. Further, only God knows how much she influenced the Viscount Perqueira who endowed and made possible the Pontifical Portuguese Seminary in Rome. The Viscount’s witness is eloquent:

“As a boy I had known the House of the Good Shepherd because my mother was a member of the Board of Directors and thus was well acquainted with the superior, for whom I immediately felt a great respect and veneration. I have always thought her to be a saint. My own life quite accidentally was influenced by her. I once went to the Good Shepherd to ask her to pray for me for a special grace which I needed, and I then told her frankly that this concerned my salvation. She answered that our

Lord awaited me and would save me. This answer increased my admiration of her. I am certain that her prayers led to my decision to marry. I presented my bride to her and from then on we were frequent visitors at the Good Shepherd. The superior always received us with cordiality while she was still well and even after she was an invalid in bed, where she suffered the last years of her life.

"Because of my gratitude and devotion towards her, I myself built and paid for the laundry and purchased land in Paranhos which she desired for a cemetery and where she herself was later buried. I believe, although she never spoke about the subject to me, that it was because of her influence that I built the Portuguese Seminary in Rome. Many times she had spoken to me of the necessity of a good formation for the clergy and of the great good that would come from this but she never specifically spoke to me about the seminary. I journeyed to Rome without even thinking about a seminary. Once there, remembering Sister Maria's words, the idea of such a foundation was born in me. From that moment, - because I was certain it was due to her influence, I did all I could to have the seminary consecrated to the Heart of Jesus. When it had been built, I requested that a picture of Sister Maria, sent me by her father, be placed there... On the very day and hour when that college was consecrated to the Sacred Heart in Rome, my wife and I were making this same consecration at Paray-le-Monial. Her father, too, was convinced that the seminary was due to her, for every time he visited Rome he went to the seminary in memory of his daughter."<sup>71</sup>

To this day, Sister Maria's picture hangs in the hall of the Portuguese Seminary in Rome. From the day of its foundation there has not been a priest from that seminary who has returned to his country without remembering the apostolate of Sister Maria and without knowing her as a protectress of the Portuguese clergy.

## *Maria . . . Rabboni*

On February 8, 1896, was celebrated at the Motherhouse of Angers the fiftieth anniversary of profession of Sister Marine Verger, Superior General. Mother Marine had ties with the early days of the Institute. She had been received into the community by Saint Mary Euphrasia herself and for sometime had been close to her. She had founded communities which the holy Foundress had long ago predicted would become effective foundations. For her jubilee celebration all the superiors of the Institute had been invited to come to Angers. Sister Maria, too, was going to the Motherhouse. For her, it provided a good opportunity to explore with her superior general some of the unsolved problems of Oporto.

She began her trip to Angers on January 30, 1896, in the company of another sister. As it happened, Abbot Schober, too, was traveling at the same time and they formed a group for part of the journey. A pilgrimage to Alba di Tormes was arranged for January 31.

The evening of the 30th they arrived at Salamanca and stayed the night with Father Torquato Alfonso Cabral Alvares Ribeiro, a Jesuit and at that time a student. Father Cabral has described the pilgrimage at Alba.

"Sister Maria and her companion arrived at Salamanca accompanied by Dom Ildefonso Schober, Abbot of the Benedictines in Seckau, and by Father Ramos, his secretary. The following day I went with them to the tomb of St. Teresa and served a Mass celebrated by the Abbot at the high altar. After dinner we went to the sacristy to see several relics and the incorrupt heart of Saint Teresa. Sister Maria wrote her name in the visitors' book. While she was doing so she asked me if she should add her family name and I responded that, yes, she should. Back in Salamanca she wanted to see the fountain of Saint Teresa which was on a nearby street. "<sup>72</sup>

What actually happened was that near the altar of Saint Teresa, Maria was listening to the voice of her Lord, not unlike at Manresa on her first journey to Portugal.<sup>73</sup>

The group separated the next day and Sister Maria and her companion continued on to Angers, via Lourdes. When she said goodbye to her spiritual director, she gave him a letter, written hurriedly and in pencil:

"After the Consecration, during which I had prayed to our Lord through the intercession of Saint Teresa to purify my soul from sin, He assured me that He had pardoned me everything, that He had washed and cleansed my soul, that I would grow in His intimacy. After Holy Communion, lovingly, tenderly, He called me by name, 'Maria,' something He had not done for a long time. He told me then, in that voice which I know so well and which rings in my heart, that He wanted that day to contract a more intimate union with me. In proof of this He would let me taste (for how long I do not know) a peace such as I had never felt before. I cannot tell you what I experienced; it was like on the morning of my profession but a much deeper communion-calm and intimate. I remembered that when at Manresa I had been overcome by a strong desire for suffering and sacrifice and afterwards when I turned to Him in my fatigues at Oporto, with the cross weighing on me, I was able to accept them with ardor. Today I did not feel anything. I did not realize this was a new point of departure.

"I prayed and waited calmly His moment. He did not make me wait long. Very soon He spoke thus: that the time for my violent desire for suffering had passed and now I should ask for an entire and peaceful abandonment. From now on I am to live more intimately with Him, that He wants to make our union more intense; therefore, He does not want violent sacrifices or excessive fatigues any more. He will give me more time and tranquility in which to commune



with Him and He will see that I continue this journey in calm and peace. The only condition laid on me for this more intimate alliance is the detachment of my heart from all that is of earth. As a bubble of soap rises in the air so must I rise above all human support. Thus, He said, the moment of my separation from you had come. I should continue peacefully, calmly, to build on the foundation you have given me. And He gave me Saint Teresa, Saint Gertrude, and Saint Catherine of Siena for my special models, protectors, and companions.

"And now I lose myself in the love and mercy of my Divine Spouse, as a drop of water becomes lost in the ocean. As the sea fills everything, so does His love fill my whole being. I will never forget that Communion. How cruel that I had to leave just when I was quenching my thirst and could drink deep drops and inebriate myself at the source of Divine Love. But such was the will of my Divine Spouse and this did not take away my joy and peace. Pray for me that I may correspond to the designs of our Lord according to the way that you have traced for me. I will never be able to thank you enough and I will never forget you for even one day in my prayers" <sup>74</sup>

After he had copied this letter, Abbe Chasle added:

"Without dwelling on the similarity between Saint Teresa, Saint Gertrude, Saint Catherine and Sister Maria, it is very important to observe that she loved Saint Catherine as she did the first two. The heroic devotion of the tertiary of Siena to the interests of the Church and the sublime example of her soul, so intimately and constantly united with God, excited Sister Maria's admiration. She used to call her, her 'saint of predilection.' " <sup>75</sup>

### *Towards Angers and Munster*

On February 2nd Maria and her companion stopped at

Lourdes. This was a brief visit and she said nothing about it in her correspondence or in her diary. Finally, they arrived at Angers. The Superior General received them with special kindness. During the jubilee celebration which lasted three days, the sisters who were there noticed that the superior of Oporto tried to render any spontaneous service to others which she could. Her affectionate care for others was also shown in her habitual smile. It was plain, too, to see how this religious from a noble family practised poverty. Her habit was old, her shoes even more so, and her veil had been mended so many times that not even the hem seemed intact. Yet, she was among the most joyful and amiable sisters there.

After the celebration was over and the superiors had returned to their convents, Mother Marine held back Sister Maria, desiring to have her as companion on some visits in several houses in the south of France. Also, the Good Shepherd community at Munster and her own family too had requested that she be allowed to go there for a visit. Maria hesitated about this, feeling it her duty to return to her work as soon as possible. Mother Marine, however, told her to go to Munster. With deep, intense emotion Sister Maria, after two years absence, took the route to her own country, to that area she loved more than anywhere else, where she had been born and whose language was her own. The Divine Spouse had asked a complete detachment of her, and then with gracious delicacy He sent her again to see her dear ones.

Both at the Good Shepherd of Munster and at Darfeld Castle the news of her return spread. Enroute she stopped a few days at the convent in Aix-la-Chapelle where the sisters had installed an electrically operated laundry for training the girls. Maria thought she might be able to do the same in Portugal and wanted to study the plant.<sup>76</sup> Having done this she continued on her way to Munster.

Max came as far as Cologne to meet her and accompany her to Munster, where they arrived February 21. She was given a

delirious welcome at the convent. Everyone laughed and wept at once. Her young girls wanted that she never go away again. She herself was deeply moved.

Then her parents and brothers and sisters came. It did not seem possible that this was she herself. She had many things to share with them-her affection, memories of the past, new things. It was their same Maria; she had not changed. However, her parents and also her sisters in the convent began to notice that this dear sister, so tall and beautiful in her long white habit, could not remain standing but was obliged to sit down immediately on account of weakness in her spine. A gnawing fear became mixed with the joy of having her. But Maria had no worries or fears. She was serene and peaceful.

After eight days, nevertheless, the pain of again leaving this dear land began to overwhelm her. It was a very deep anguish for her. She almost felt as she had at her first departure for Cologne. She had to struggle with herself; she had to remember that she was a spouse and that she had to be a courageous spouse. As she said in her native German, "Heldenbraut." And so the train took her away from Westphalia, from her Munster, from all her dear ones whose tenderness made her weep.

William and his wife went with her part of the way. He later said:

"We accompanied her for a while on the train. When I asked her why she was returning so willingly to that horrible country, she looked at me and answered in a tone I shall never forget, 'Because the people are so needy spiritually.' "<sup>77</sup>

She went back to Angers and started with the Superior General for the south of France. However, at Angouleme, Mother Marine became ill and advised Sister Maria to return to Portugal. There she arrived March 10, 1896, and this time, not as on her first arrival, many persons were at the station to meet her and to

accompany her to the Good Shepherd. Oporto was claiming her.

### *My Cross Is of Straw*

As soon as she had returned to Oporto, Maria set to work again. However, very soon she realized she had difficulty walking. She had intense pain in her head, shoulders and hip. The doctors at first suspected a cerebral anemia, but on the 21st of May, when she was unable to get out of bed, the medical consultants diagnosed myelitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and bone marrow.)

In the weeks that followed, her condition worsened until it was feared there would be no quick recovery. So, on the 27th of June she received the Last Sacraments.

News of her condition spread and novenas were begun to implore from the Lord her cure. Even the Cardinal Archbishop of Oporto wanted to comfort her by visiting her. This impressed the people, for the Cardinal was very reserved about making visits. He authorized public prayers for her in the churches of the city, while friends of the Good Shepherd had the best available doctors see her.

Everything was tried: electric therapy, shock, hot punctures, hydro therapy and forced walking to arrest the paralysis. Nothing helped.

In a space of two years Maria had saved the house in Oporto, and now when she was preparing to extend it in order to be able to help as many as 500 young girls, illness was nailing her to her bed. At the Good Shepherd the question was raised-could Maria continue to function as superior? Only one person was in peace through an of this, and that was Maria herself. On June 10th she wrote Abbot Schober:

"Because of obedience, I am praying that my life may continue. I will not refuse to live longer if I am needed for

this house. The secret desire of my heart is to be able to suffer more before I die in order to be more intimately united with Him here below and to possess Him eternally. These hours are, it is true, very difficult. For three weeks now I have been in bed without being able to do anything. Yet in these moments I know who I am and I relish yet more knowing Him who is my Spouse. Do you understand me? The thought 'spouse of Christ' makes everything sweet and light, even the thought of death and judgment. I know my Judge; I hope in Him who will, through His great mercy, pardon all my sins. He cannot reject His spouse while I contemplate for the first time His divine face, something I have desired for so many years!

"The doctor has already twice applied hot punctures, each time in different places on either side of my spine. Not being worthy to bear in my body, as have other spouses of Jesus Christ, the sacred stigmata, I have them at least thanks to this fire. Oh! that this might be the last purification of the gold. But, no! I must not speak like that. Other holy virgins because of their faith were burned by fire. I must bear this treatment in order to recover my health for the glory of God and for the good of souls (or so I think) in order to become a victim of love, not only in soul but also in body. What joy for the spouse! I cannot sing in chapel but there is a song only for those who follow the Lamb and neither sickness nor sorrow can prevent me from singing it. I am in bed all the day. I can scarcely take a step. Therefore, I am really on the cross, but it is a cross of straw while that of our Lord was one of hard wood. Before Him I feel in the antechamber of Heaven. 'His left hand is under my head and his right arm embraces me.' (Song of Songs 8/3)

"The flowers have never been so beautiful nor the sky so blue. Will this be the last invitation, or will there be other occasions of suffering and of work? That depends on God. If only I could hear you once more repeat that it is truly

permitted me to love, to suffer and to die as a spouse of Jesus Christ in every sense of that word, it would be for me a great consolation. I still have many doubts which come and go and which hold back my flight towards the Heart of Jesus, where I can rest as does the dove in the cleft of the rock."<sup>78</sup>

After writing this letter to the Abbot, Maria received the Sacrament of the Sick on the eve of June 27. She wrote her mother:

"I am writing to you with hands just now anointed because I have received Extreme Unction, after having gone to confession, renewing my vows, and receiving Holy Viaticum. You cannot imagine how happy I am and in what peace I am."<sup>79</sup>

A few days later she wrote her brother William:

"Please don't pray that my sufferings diminish; pray that by sacrifice and suffering the flames of love may become ever more ardent within me."<sup>80</sup>

### *The Mission of Monsignor Ribeiro*

Even though doctors, nurses, sisters and lay friends recognized the gravity of Maria's illness, in God's plan, she was not to die then. She had much suffering ahead and her life would not end until she had accomplished the special mission in the Church for which God had been preparing her.

She would require a qualified and competent witness in order to cooperate with the requests she was to receive from God while nailed to the cross of her bed. Again it was to be a priest, learned and capable both of understanding Maria's mystical experiences and of transmitting the message Jesus would confide to her. This priest was Monsignor Tuetonia Ribeiro Viera de Castro, at that time, Vice Rector of the seminary of Oporto and a canon of the

cathedral.<sup>81</sup>

Monsignor Ribeiro became Maria's spiritual director almost by accident. He later recalled this:

"I began to know Sister Maria of the Divine Heart in 1896. At that time Reverend Louis Ruas, of holy memory, who had founded the House of the Good Shepherd of Oporto, had written me in the name of the superior asking me to become confessor to the religious of that convent. Because I was overburdened with much work both inside and outside the seminary, I answered that I could not do so. But Dom Rua begged me to comply for at least a short time to allow the superior to find another confessor. I agreed for two months. Shortly after this, the superior became ill and because she could not look for another confessor I condescended to be confessor for the religious. Her illness was prolonged and I had to continue up until her death.

"Sister Maria continually wanted to explain to me the extraordinary graces which she had received from God, but which had nothing to do with her sacramental confession. She had doubts on some matters concerned with the unusual in her life and so wanted to see me outside of the confessional. I did not have time to see her the same day as I heard confessions because that entailed dispensing the sacrament to the entire community as well as to the girls. So, I suggested that she explain in writing what she would like to say to me. This she did from November, 1896, right up until her death."<sup>82</sup>

On November 20, 1896, Maria wrote Monsignor Ribeiro:

"It is impossible to tell you how happy I am that you know everything and that you are willing to direct and help me."<sup>83</sup>

Thanks to Monsignor Ribeiro and the conditions under which he accepted direction of Maria, we have her autobiography plus fifty letters of direction. These not only allow us to look inside her soul but they form a tribute to the ascetical and mystical theology which dominated her life.

### *The Count and Countess Visit Oporto*

While Maria remained immovable on the cross of her bed, in Darfeld her family was worried about her. The Countess would have liked to run immediately to her daughter's bedside, but feared to disturb the serenity which was hers because of her detachment from earthly ties. But for Maria, notwithstanding her thirst for greater physical and moral suffering, it was an added cross to know that her mother and father were in anguish because of her. This was the summer of 1896 when she was still receiving direction from Abbot Schober. She knew that the Abbot was going to north Germany on business and would be in Darfeld. She wrote him:

"Every day I see more clearly that it is a martyrdom for my mother not to come and visit me. She writes me that she does not want to take back the sacrifice made to God. But my illness goes on and my poor mother is suffering terribly. It seems to me, but you can judge this better than I can, that my parents could come to see me in perfect peace and that our good Lord would not consider their doing so as being a want of generosity."<sup>84</sup>

Abbot Schober agreed and talked with her parents. They immediately left for Portugal and arrived in Oporto on September 12, 1896.<sup>85</sup> Documentation concerning this visit is very limited except for two letters, one from the Countess to the children at home in Darfeld, and one from the Count to William.

"Maria received us with joy and love. She was sitting upon her bed, leaning against many cushions. I remained a long time with her. She wanted to know about each one



of you and about our trip. . .

The same gaiety, the same vitality as always. However, she seemed somewhat changed. Her face was thinner but her eyes still very expressive. She was not as pale as usual and often changed color.

"During dinner she got up for a while and after eating, I helped while she was taken to the parlor. I then received a clearer impression of her condition. She is able to move her feet but she cannot stand erect and every movement must be made very slowly and with great care, because if her movements are quick she feels this in her spine and becomes dizzy. She was placed very carefully in the wheelchair near her bed and then taken slowly to the parlor. It is necessary to move her in such a way as to avoid causing dizziness; the infirmarian knows just how to do this. In the parlor she was placed in a very soft armchair which the German Consul had sent her."<sup>86</sup>

That was the Countess writing. The Count in his letter to William referred to concern about Maria being superior and an arrangement made with the Cardinal.

"Maria's health changes. Sometimes it is better, sometimes worse. The doctor says that in order to improve she must have absolute rest and no mental worries. To insure this, there has been much reflection and discussion, with even the Cardinal himself visiting the convent. He is a venerable prelate, very kind toward Maria and he put an end to all the questioning.

"Maria must remain as superior; the Cardinal does not want another. She will retain the title of superior but her assistant can direct the business of the house. Maria must do everything possible to regain her health. She must get well because the community needs her. The Cardinal also wanted a Franciscan Sister, a trained nurse, to take over

the nursing responsibility so that the sisters would not be overburdened and Maria could be freed from responsibility.

"She was pleased with the Cardinal's decision and has remained relaxed. We are also very happy we can leave with assurance that this is not the last time we will see her on this earth and this does not exclude you either."<sup>87</sup>

But there- was more, notwithstanding the special nurse. Sister Maria well knew the reason for her illness and suffering. Her joy was motivated by supernatural reasons known only to herself.

### *The 'unusual' in Sister Maria*

Without consideration of the extraordinary which Maria experienced in her soul, some circumstances and events of her last illness cannot be explained. What were these phenomena?

She herself certified to them in her autobiographical notes which she submitted to Monsignor Ribeiro. She feared being in error.

"While I was a novice our Lord comforted me in Holy Communion and on days of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It was then that He taught me to carry the cross and He let me know that my suffering would increase, that mine was to be a way of the cross, that I would remain nailed to the cross in order to be united in Him.

"But what a prudent Master He is! He prepares one with so much mercy and gives all necessary grace so that when one realizes that this is according to what He has taught, it costs no sacrifice because one has been prepared by Him beforehand.

"I remember an instruction He gave me during my novitiate. One time He said to me, 'Spouse of My Heart,

come closer to My Heart.' And immediately He spoke to me about suffering and my vocation to suffer and to immolate myself for Him.

"A few moments of union with Him are compensation for long months of anguish and suffering. Sometimes I would become lost in thought. I remember those words which made such an impression on me-'Deus absconditus.' Truly, He is a *hidden God*. (Isaiah 45/15). I remained hours and hours meditating on those words. I cannot explain this; there were moments during which our Lord seemed to take my heart in order to let me experience an intimate union with Him. I cannot explain. 'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.' (Psalm 34/9). Only one who has experienced this can understand what passes between God and the soul. Since I am writing this only for you, Father, you will understand, and it is not necessary to explain what I could not, anyhow.

"Yes, He is truly a hidden God; in the Blessed Sacrament which is our life, our all, He hides His divinity and His humanity in giving Himself to us, to call forth our faith. The effects of a visit from this Hidden God, be it a sacramental visit or solely as a favor to His chosen ones, are hidden also. They are known only to those few souls whom He deigns to visit in this way.

"Now I would like to explain to you a little the communications of our Lord. In 1884 I heard that voice which called me to be spouse of His Divine Heart. At other times there were affectionate conversations, consoling and instructive words. Sometimes there was a note of prophecy. He has various ways in which he communicates Himself. Some words cannot be forgotten; some concern the present, the duties of the moment; other are instructive for all our lives; others are understood only after a long time has elapsed and the soul does not know what they mean when she first hears them. But she knows it is He

who speaks; that His words are real.

"I had already heard these words of instruction, of consolation, and of love while I was still at home and during my novitiate. The prophetic words, which were few and precise, did not come until the time of which I am speaking. They were not many. With certainty I remember those of 1884.<sup>88</sup> Later on they became more frequent. Our Lord began to say words to me regarding other people and His desires for them.

"Our Lord communicated secret matters to me by means of interior images and very strong inner impressions. Very often He used a statue or a picture of His Heart or a crucifix, etc. . . .

"Sometimes I experienced these impressions and heard His words without being at prayer. They would take hold of me without my knowing it, without my being able to react. Usually, though, it is in Holy Communion or when I am praying before the Blessed Sacrament exposed but the times I receive them are when I least expect them.

"But I have never seen Him with the eyes of my body. Everything is interior, as a voice which speaks and which is heard in the heart and at the same time in the intellect. The faculties of the soul are recollected and united in our Lord in a profound peace. Sometimes it might be only for an instant; sometimes it happens so rapidly it cannot be explained.

"At times a long interval passes without experiencing or feeling anything. At other times I receive heavenly graces at frequent intervals, as you will note, Father.

"It costs me to write all this; however, obedience requires it and our Lord comes to help me remember all and to feel everything as if it were happening now. Actually

I experience an extraordinary facility in writing all this. I don't know if I have explained myself; it is very difficult to find words which can describe, at least a little, that which is altogether supernatural, especially for someone who is as stupid as I am and in a foreign language.

"It may be that I have written silly things, in which case, Father, please be so good as to correct me."<sup>89</sup>

Sister Maria Droste has been beatified not because of extraordinary phenomena but because of the holiness of her life. Those familiar with the processes of beatification and canonization in the Church know that anything extraordinary is weighed very carefully and usually judged negatively. Examinations of such phenomena are strict in order to prove that they have not been obstacles to holiness as seen in the 'heroic exercise of Christian virtues.' But, in order better to understand what follows, it is wise to look at the unusual in Sister Maria to see if these phenomena were merely fantasy or whether they were genuine.

What Maria experienced are termed in ascetical and mystical theology "intellectual visions and locutions." The supernatural authenticity of the former are proved by their effects.

"The wonderful effects an intellectual vision produces in the soul are the best proof we have that they are of divine intervention. The light which fills the depths of the soul, the love which moves it, unmistakeable peace, desire for heavenly things, disgust for all that is not God are the best proofs that one has experienced an illumination which is superior to nature. An absolute certitude is one of the characteristic signs of intellectual visions. Saint Teresa tells us that the Lord impresses upon the soul a knowledge so clear that it is not possible to doubt it. The soul comes out of the experience with such security that doubt can have no force."<sup>90</sup>

Maria speaks of "suffering, of deep peace, of certainty that it is He who is speaking."

"Mystical locutions are perceived by the intellect, as if they were coming clearly from another person without the subject doing anything on his own part, whether the mind is recollected or distracted. . . They have an extraordinary efficacy for producing in the soul that which they signify. For example, if God says to the soul, 'Be humble and relaxed,' instantly the soul feels itself filled with humility and enjoys serene peace, even though a few minutes before it had been in great tribulation . . . In these locutions. . . illusion is not possible. . . The soul must humble itself and abandon itself into the hands of God without seeking or caring for anything else. The soul feels itself overwhelmed by the sovereign majesty of God, whose words are operating, says Saint Teresa."<sup>91</sup>

This teaching on visions and locutions of Saint Teresa of Avila, a Doctor of the Church, is borne out in the extraordinary as experienced by Blessed Maria Droste.

*But I have never seen anything with the eyes of my body; everything is interior as if a voice were speaking, and one hears it in the heart and at the same time in the intellect. . . usually it is in Holy Communion . . . and sometimes even when I least expect it.*<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps there should be a deeper study made of the mystical experiences of Blessed Maria Droste.

### *An Instrument of the Generosity of Jesus*

Maria's illness had a strange and inexplicable clinical symptomology. While her parents were with her she could scarcely move her feet or hold herself erect. When they left, they went on pilgrimage to Lourdes, arriving there October 2, 1896. That very day Maria became unexplainably better. She was carried to the chapel for Vespers, sang in a strong voice the invocation introducing the prayer-"Deus in adjutorium . . ."-and the concluding prayer. Not only that, but during the singing of the Magnificat, helped by a sister, she was able to stand, holding

herself erect as she had formerly done. But, this was for a few moments only and it was the last time she was to put her feet on the ground.

During that same October the more serious symptoms returned daily high fever, atrocious pain which lasted for weeks. It was during the return of this suffering that she learned about her future. On November 21st, again on that decisive date,<sup>93</sup> she wrote Monsignor Ribeiro:

"On Saturday the 21 st of November, feast of the Presentation of our Lady, while I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, our Lord told me that it was useless for me to think that I would walk again, for I would not be able to do so except' with great difficulty and if one day He would specifically ask it for His glory. But I was to remain a prisoner of His love, for He was keeping my feet tied with the chains of His love, in order to teach me what great purity He wants of me, not permitting that my feet touch the earth, that I be completely detached from every created thing and have only holy aspirations and heavenly desires.

"As I remember the interior pain I suffered for so many years because of so much activity, I asked our Lord if He expected me to begin again that life so full of suffering in which He had left me so little time for remaining alone with Him. He answered that I was to take up again the care of the spiritual life of the house, holding conferences and chapters for the religious and looking after their needs. But my former activity in temporal affairs and external relationships was not expected of me. However, I needed to be ready to sacrifice myself for these exercises, for certain visits of importance when His glory or the good of the house would be in question. I should confide the accounts and correspondence to someone else. I myself had a great desire to be freed from being superior. I even had temptations to discouragement, to sadness, to a want

of resignation to this His will, which temptations, however, I have overcome with His help.

"Our Lord also made me understand that when the Mystical Body of the Church needed help for some general or particular need, He usually sends some corporal suffering, illness, etc. to this or that one of His spouses, who then become instruments of His generosity."<sup>94</sup>

This same voice of Jesus two centuries before had revealed the same divine plan to Saint Rose of Lima, another mystic. "By mandate from Christ, using the very words pronounced by Him, I admonish you-we cannot find grace without suffering affliction."<sup>95</sup>

### *Apostle of Frequent Communion*

After Maria was first given the Sacrament of the Sick she received daily Holy Communion as Viaticum. Because of the gravity of her condition, her confessor permitted her to receive Holy Communion without the complete Eucharistic fast. However, when her illness was prolonged and Monsignor Ribeiro noticed that she could read, write and act as superior, he questioned her right to daily Communion under the form of Viaticum. He expressed these doubts to Maria, who was very pained by them. He decided to consult the Cardinal and to follow the latter's advice. The Cardinal responded that this case was exceptional and that he could continue to permit this invalid Sister to receive daily Holy Communion without fasting. "The superior of the Good Shepherd is a saint," he added with conviction. Monsignor Ribeiro reassured Maria and told her that the Cardinal had given permission. She was so happy that she did not cease to thank and praise God for this.

This was not all. Our Lord wished to strengthen her by permitting that she receive Holy Communion until the day of her death, inspiring her with a desire to be an apostle of frequent Communion for the good of many souls. In a long letter to Monsignor Ribeiro she wrote:



"One day when I was very sad, thinking I might lose permission to communicate without fasting and then I would not be able to receive Holy Communion at all because of my illness, I spoke to our Lord. He reassured me, telling me that He would see that I had daily Communion, and if you were to withdraw the permission, He would permit me to fall into such a condition that I would get permission again to receive Holy Communion without fasting. He has kept His word. I did not want to speak to you about this right away because I was sure of the Divine permission and it seemed wiser for me to await your decision and the course of events. Our Lord has told me that as a reward for doing this He will specially bless you and the Archbishop.

"Some months ago our Lord caused me to understand how sorry He is because in Germany, especially in convents, there is opposition to frequent Communion. He exhorted me to do all I can to cause this state of things to cease, and He assured me that every time I would procure, even indirectly, His entrance into a heart, He would give me a greater degree of eternal glory. In order to satisfy this desire of our Lord I have written about it to Abbot Schober, but I believe I must profit from other occasions to satisfy Him.

"Once, reflecting upon the immense goodness of our Lord, who does not leave me without Communion a single day while many are deprived of this because of illness, He made me understand that He treated me thus to show the great desire of His Heart to unite Himself to souls and also to show His fidelity to me as my Spouse, giving me an illuminating proof of His love.

"At another time, instructing me on this same point, He told me that He had desired to establish the cult of His Divine Heart and that since the apparitions to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque the external cult had been

introduced and propagated everywhere, so now He wished that the interior cult be established; that is, that souls would form a habit of uniting themselves to Him, offering Him a dwelling in their hearts; and that as witness to this desire of His, He would continue, in spite of all inherent obstacles, to give Himself to me each day in Holy Communion.

"One day He told me that I must be the apostle of His Heart, first, by my joy in suffering-showing forth the happiness of a soul intimately united with Him, thus inspiring in others the desire to love and praise in a greater way His Divine Heart. Secondly, by profiting of every occasion to win hearts to Him,"<sup>96</sup>

### *Love, Sacrifice, and Reparation*

An exact history requires knowledge of the "why" of the spiritual immolation of Sister Maria Droste. We already know the answer she gave her brother William and his wife while on the train with them leaving Munster-"Because the Portuguese people are so needy spiritually."<sup>97</sup> On July 16, 1896, about two months after the inception of her serious illness of myelitis, she wrote Abbot Schober:

"You ask particular details concerning my conversations with Jesus. Oh! If I could tell you everything and all at once, how we would praise God together for His goodness and His condescension! My sufferings will increase and will last as long as His love has established for this, but the dawn of the eternal day is already beginning to appear. The singing of the *Veni, Sponsa Christi*, which I have already heard for some time, becomes ever more sweet and near. You cannot guess how happy I am!

"On the feast of the Sacred Heart I asked our Lord what pleased Him most in my regard-death or illness. He answered, 'A vase in a vertical position can hold the most liquid; if it is tipped it cannot be filled.' So, my heart must be

totally turned towards Him without any other desires in order to receive without obstacle the waters of grace and to acquire abundant merits. This sweet calling multiplies itself and my heart burns with love and desire. I regretted this because it seemed in contrast to what He had previously told me but it seemed He was pleased with this. Sometimes He looks at me as if He wants to say, 'Do you want to leave Me alone to carry My cross without helping Me ? Then I do not hesitate to add, 'No! My Savior, I will suffer with you just as long as you want if this will lighten Your cross, especially the cross you are bearing for Portugal.' "<sup>98</sup>

Several times Maria returns to the subject of the cross of Portugal. What was it and why the cross? Sister Annunciation, the assistant given her by the Superior General,<sup>99</sup> explains:

"The first years of her illness, during the winter of 1897, our dear Sister was having a very deep crisis of suffering. I was watching near her at night when she said, 'You wonder why I'm suffering so much. I will tell you. I am consumed by a thirst for suffering. When I arrived at Oporto in 1894, I was told that in this country there are many priests who have forgotten the duties of their state. This made such a deep impression on me, because thanks be to God in Germany I had never heard anything like this, that I offered myself to the good God as a victim for the priests of Portugal. That is why I suffer:

- 1) "To offer myself to the good God as a victim for these priests.
- 2) "As a propitiatory offering to beg for new and holy priests for Portugal.
- 3) "for love of God.

"And I know that the good God has accepted my offering."<sup>100</sup>

Monsignor Ribeiro in his witness during the process confirms Sister Maria's offering of immolation, referring to a letter from her dated November 20, 1896.<sup>101</sup> He goes on to say that in another, dated July 23, 1897, she had told him that our Lord had said to her after Communion:

"I have again today chosen you as a victim, as a holocaust for the conversion and renewal of... (you, Father, know who. ..) and for the expiation of sacrileges. Therefore, I give you again My Heart with all its treasures. Your motto must be: LOVE, SACRIFICE, REPARATION"<sup>102</sup>

In the same letter of July 23, 1897, she added that the first time Jesus had mentioned reparation to her was at Lourdes, February 2, 1896, when the voice of the Lord told her that she should abandon herself to the decisions of her superior, adding:

"You will go to suffer, you must suffer, you must let yourself be rolled as a ball, now on this side, now on that, now here, now there."<sup>103</sup>

The first mention of reparation was made to Maria at Lourdes. In Fatima in 1917 the Mother of God will ask "Penance, penance, penance!" Also in 1917, Blessed Maxmillian Kolbe in Rome will begin his crusade for the conversion of the Masons and of all enemies of the Church.<sup>104</sup>

The following extract from a letter of 1896 from Maria to Monsignor Ribeiro causes reflection on the role of Mary in the history of conversion and salvation of sinners:

"One day during my illness, after Communion I was reciting the *Te Deum* when I came to the words, 'Non horruisti Virginis uterum' (You did not disdain the womb of the Virgin). Our Lord filled my soul with sweet consolation and said that, not having abhorred the womb of the Virgin, neither did He abhor the hearts of virgins to make there His

dwelling, to find there His delight. Then He made me understand that we owe to the mystery of the Incarnation the blessing of possessing Him as Spouse. The Blessed Virgin, whom He had chosen for His Mother, could not be His Spouse but those whom He chooses as such belong in a special way to His most holy Mother. I can't explain what happened within my soul. Our Lord made me taste the delights of His love. He always leaves me an ever more ardent desire to suffer for Him and to detach myself from all that is not He."<sup>105</sup>

### *Death in the Family*

In 1890 Maria's fifteen-year-old sister Tonia (Antonia) had died. That year Maria had been a novice at the Good Shepherd in Munster. In 1897 while she was seriously ill in Oporto, her sister Augusta, the eldest in the family, died. Tonia had died October 17, feast of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, who had been beatified by Pius IX on September 18, 1864; Augusta died on the First Friday of April. The fact of these two deaths on two days honoring the Heart of Jesus caused Maria to mention the coincidence in her autobiography in 1899:

"In 1890 my younger sister Antonia became very ill. She was only fifteen. At the beginning of her illness she did not know how to resign herself to suffering and death. Slowly, she changed completely and became full of patience and of admirable resignation. Feeling death drawing closer, she had a happiness and joy that did not seem to be of this world. Her death was extraordinary and was seen as a special grace. At the moment of dying she began to smile and was so resplendent that the confessor who was assisting exclaimed, 'Oh! how beautiful!' As soon as she had drawn her last breath my parents intoned the Magnificat. It was October 17, feast of Blessed Margaret Mary.

"On April 2, 1897, in the same room and not less

favorably, my dear sister Augusta died, assisted by our maternal uncle, the bishop; by two priests, and by all the family, after having made a sacrifice of her life with great generosity. All during her illness she was consoled in feeling herself united with me in suffering. In fact, I endured the torments of death so that suffering could be withheld from her. She asked her confessor to bring her Holy Communion once more and told him she had only ten minutes. This was well calculated, because in ten minutes, after she had received, she gave her last breath and our Lord called her to her eternal communion. It was the First Friday of the month. She had a very special devotion to the Heart of Jesus and it was this sister with whom I was most intimate. Nobody can deny in these two very holy deaths a special grace of the Heart of Jesus."<sup>106</sup>

In the spring of 1897, Sister Maria could write very little because of the position in which she was forced to lie. As a footnote to a letter written by her sister assistant, she added a note:

"My darling sister, just a word full of love and compassion to *you* in your suffering. How consoled I am to know that you have received the last Sacraments. I know well what grace and strength they bring."

This letter was returned to her with a postscript from her mother:

"Augusta received your letter at noon of the day on which she left us. She gave it back to me. Unfortunately, the others arrived after her death. Mamma."

Maria sent her condolences to her family after the announcement of Augusta's death:

"What shall I say today? My heart is full of sorrow like yours, but I am in great peace. . . I feel as though it is all a

dream; I cannot believe it has happened. We have not lost Augusta; she is still with us."<sup>107</sup>

### *The First Message from the Lord*

From December 13 to May 16, 1897 we have no letters from Maria to her spiritual director; neither are there any to her family in her own handwriting.

During the last weeks of 1896, in spite of her intense pain and the impossibility of leaving her bed, she worked much, verifying accounts, looking carefully into the financial situation of the house which only she had handled up until then. She gave the same attention to the sisters of the community and held the customary "New Year's Chapter" December 31 with the community gathered around her bed.<sup>108</sup>

But the next day she had an alarming physical crisis, her worst yet. To symptoms of convulsion and suffocation was added a paralysis of the abdominal region. From that day until her death she had to submit herself through obedience to medications and treatments which were very offensive to her delicacy, product of her times as she was. The medical doctors again proposed that she be released from being superior and again the Cardinal was unrelenting. He said, "Her very shadow is worth more than any other superior."<sup>109</sup>

During the month of May, quite unexpectedly Maria had a turn for the better. This sort of thing was to repeat itself. Her illness would drag on for another two years, alternately lessening and worsening in ways which the medical doctors could not always understand. Mysteriously, there was a relationship between her suffering and illness and the special ecclesial mission which was hers from God. It was after her change for the worse in the first months of 1897 that she heard for the first time our Lord ordering her to ask the Pope, His Vicar, to consecrate the human race to His Sacred Heart.

The sole witness of this is Monsignor Ribeiro. Maria was frightened and confused by the request made of her. In the letter she wrote her confessor she simply told him that something extraordinary had happened but she did not specify in writing what it was. Instead she spoke directly with him about it. Monsignor Ribeiro attests:

"The first time was June 4, 1897. On that day she told me that our Lord had ordered her to tell me that it was His wish that she write to the Pope to ask him to consecrate the whole human race to his Sacred Heart. She therefore asked of me permission to write to Rome. She wrote a letter the following day.

"I was surprised by this request and told her that I would think about it and that since Abbot Schober was passing through Oporto she should ask his advice also. This she did, and I too conferred with the Abbot about this. He seemed to me to be very inclined to admit the supernatural character of the message but he did not really pronounce a definitive judgment because he felt this belonged to her confessor as God's representative.

"I suspended judgment on what she had confided to me, not seeing clearly whether it was from God or was the fruit of a lively and pious imagination. I told her that she could write to the Pope on condition that in her letter she did not mention her confessor. In fact, I was afraid of being censored by Rome for believing in visions and I believed that if she mentioned her confessor it would look as though I had wanted to anticipate a judgment of the Holy See. But Sister Maria of the Divine Heart answered me that she would never write to the Pope without being able to declare that she was doing so with the consent of her confessor. . I answered her that she had done her duty by communicating to me the order she had received from God and that she had no other responsibility in the matter and could remain at peace. She did indeed remain at peace



about this and did not write to the Holy Father."<sup>110</sup>

One wonders did Monsignor Ribeiro also remain at peace, especially when he read the letter Maria wrote him the next day? He mentions this letter in his deposition. In that letter Maria renewed her unconditional submission to him as her director and affirmed that she only wished to accomplish her duty and free herself from responsibility in the matter.

"Although it has cost me a great deal to write because of the weakness I am suffering today, I will do as best I can because I do not want to inconvenience you, Father, by asking you to come here to see me.

"Yesterday I was able to speak to the Abbot. I told him what you asked me to tell him. He decided nothing nor did he give his opinion, for he said that the decision belonged to you as my confessor and that I should speak to you about it again. I ask you, therefore, do not abandon me. I confide myself into your hands and I am perfectly serene. You know well that all I want is to obey and that I am free of doubt when I learn your decisions. You will then decide this question.

"My order from our Lord was simply to communicate these things. Whether they are realized or not does not matter.

"Again, I asked pardon of our Lord and I ask pardon of you for the want of frankness I have sometimes had. I spoke about this to the Abbot and he rebuked me. I have examined myself, however, and I believe I had reason in doing so, for I am always in fear of being deceived and of deceiving my director and therefore it is rather impossible for me to say certain things. I know well that I must render an account to God about these things and about whether I get carried away by my imagination and tell you only what is from the devil.

"I feel very much the weight of my sins and my great misery, and this makes it seem impossible that our Lord should give me such graces, especially with my character which I do not know how to mortify and by which I scandalise my sisters. Is it pride that makes me always think I am being deceived in spite of the fact that you have told me the contrary? You well know that I am full of pride and self-love and very often this makes me tremble. Today I was thinking that it could be pride that leads me to speak of the matter I told you about yesterday, of things which are of importance to the Church. On examining myself in the presence of the Lord I can truly say that I only spoke of them to calm my conscience and to be free of all responsibility; at the same time, I felt an inexplicable repugnance in communicating these things. Several times I begged our Lord not to exact this of me because telling my secrets to others is one of my greatest sufferings. Nevertheless, I will always be ready to do what you order me to do, no matter what it costs me.

"Today I have written you without reserve because in the event that you think it is necessary to do what our Lord is asking, there is no time to lose. You will decide and I will not think any more of these matters. I beg you to pardon me for all the work I gave you and to bless your submissive daughter, Maria of the Divine Heart."<sup>111</sup>

After this letter Maria did not again mention the question of this first request. From what can be gathered from the documentation, it would seem that Monsignor Ribeiro thought no more about that message from our Lord.

#### *At Lourdes, in Spirit*

In July, 1897, the diocese of Oporto organised a pilgrimage to Lourdes. A group of ladies who aided the House of the Good Shepherd invited the superior to take part in the pilgrimage to pray for her cure. It was not easy for Maria to decide this. On the

one hand, she well knew the reason for her illness; on the other hand, unable to reveal her secrets to strangers, she yet could not be wanting in courtesy to her benefactors. Their intentions were well motivated. If she were cured and regained her health she could continue to work for God's glory and for the good of souls and would be able to resolve the difficulties of the Good Shepherd of Oporto. But other reasons, known only to her, were operating-her ardent desire to suffer by remaining nailed to her bed, and the voice of her Lord, Who was telling her not to go.<sup>112</sup>

Peace of soul would only come to her from obedience but this time her spiritual director was perplexed and it was the Superior General in France who withheld the permission. Maria thanked our Lord, Who in this way permitted her to continue in suffering.

Nevertheless, she wanted to be present at Lourdes in spirit. Monsignor Ribeiro was director of the pilgrimage and she asked him to present in her name a special request at the grotto:

"Oh! Mary, my tender Mother, through my director and spiritual father, I offer myself wholly to you. To you I consecrate my heart; I want to belong to you in life and in death. Know then, dear Mother, that your Divine Son in His infinite mercy has chosen me in spite of my misery and sinfulness not only as spouse of His Heart but also as a victim to console Him and to make reparation for sacrileges and to obtain grace for the Portuguese clergy and pardon for poor sinners. You know my desire to respond to this invitation of His Divine Heart and to suffer ever more with love. Therefore, today I come, represented by my spiritual director, to offer through your hands a complete sacrifice of myself to His Divine Heart. Freely I renounce any desire or hope for my recovery. I embrace the cross of a long and painful illness. I accept a life of suffering and sacrifice. Nor do I desire anything else but to be immolated and consumed in suffering. I have no other desire than to console the Heart of Jesus, to suffer with Him and for Him and to be pleasing to Him. But knowing

my weakness, I beg you, holy Virgin and immaculate Mother, to take me under your holy protection and to ask of your Divine Son all the grace I will need to persevere. Help me to accomplish my sacrifice and to conquer every weakness and repugnance of my nature in order to be consumed on the cross.

"I recommend to you all the days of my life that remain to me, but especially the hour of my death, which I desire ardently because it will unite me forever, I hope, to my Divine Spouse and to you. I am ready to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls for whatever length of time God in His holy will desires. I pray you, my good Mother, to bless this your poor daughter, to bless this good house and the people confided to our care so that all may persevere in grace, and if they have lost grace they may reacquire it so that one day at last we may all be reunited around your Divine Son and you to praise and bless Him and you for all eternity. "<sup>113</sup>

### *A Church of Reparation*

Ever since she had arrived in Oporto, Maria had wanted to build a new church or chapel. After the community apostolate had been stabilized and the finances put on a secure basis, the possibility of a new church approached realization. Even Monsignor Ribeiro approved the idea.

Ill as she was, in 1897 Maria wrote the Motherhouse asking canonical permission for this. The Superior General approved, and her letter reached Oporto while Monsignor Ribeiro was in Lourdes. Maria communicated the news to him there by letter.

"I desire very much that before you leave that holy place you recommend this work to our Lady so that she may bless it and take it under her protection for the glory of her Divine Son. I would be so happy if she would let you know to whom the chapel should be dedicated. I have

already given you my thinking about this, but I await your decision for I want to do only the will of God. I beg you to place the enclosed note at the foot of the statue of the Immaculate Virgin, adding either the word 'chapel' or 'church' according to your better judgment."<sup>114</sup>

The note enclosed read:

"I pray the Immaculate Virgin to take under her protection the -----  
-----attached to the apostolate of the Good Shepherd of Oporto."<sup>115</sup>

On August 13, 1897, Maria wrote her spiritual director.

"For a long time, as you know, I have wanted to build a church on the Good Shepherd property. Uncertain as to whom this church should be dedicated I have prayed and consulted many people, without reaching a decision. On the First Friday of this month, I asked our Lord to enlighten me. After Holy Communion He said to me, 'I desire that the church be consecrated to My Heart. You must erect here a place of reparation; My part will be to make it a place of grace. I will give generously much grace to all who live in this house, those here now and those who will be here after, and to all to whom they are related.'

"Then He told me that He wished this church above all to be a place of reparation for sacrileges and for petitioning grace for the clergy. But this must remain a secret and I can only tell you.

"Then He said, 'The Vice Rector (Monsignor Ribeiro) must give himself for this work as far as he can; as a reward I will choose him as the disciple of My Heart. I will give Him My Heart; he must know how to find there his dwelling for time and eternity. And to me He said, 'As a reward to you, I take you in a new way to be completely all Mine and I will make you every day more like to Me.' 'With

suffering?' I asked. He responded 'yes.' Because His entire life had been consecrated to the Father for the salvation of souls, so must mine be also."<sup>116</sup>

In his deposition Monsignor Ribeiro adds that Maria told him that should she die before the church was begun or completed, her sisters should remember this desire of His and satisfy it for love of His Heart,<sup>117</sup>

After this message, Maria grew worse and remained in a serious condition until December and beyond that, except for slight intervals, until Easter of 1898. Monsignor Ribeiro later recalled:

"Various crises in health obliged her to long interruptions. In April she was still working on the project of the new church, in spite of the fact that she had to remain in such a position as not to be able to raise her head, and her hands were semi-paralysed so that she could hold a pencil only with three fingers."<sup>118</sup>

In August, 1898, the architect working with Maria completed the drawings.<sup>119</sup> These were left as a spiritual legacy to her sisters and to Monsignor Ribeiro. They could not begin construction until 1904, five years after Maria's death. In 1910 the church was nearly finished but the Portuguese revolution, followed by the First World War, suspended work on the building.<sup>120</sup>

### *First Letter to Pope Leo XIII*

The first letter in which Maria asked the Pope to consecrate the human race to the Heart of Jesus was sent from Oporto June 10, 1898. It was not easy for Sister Maria to obtain permission from Monsignor Ribeiro and she could not write without his permission. The previous request from the Lord had remained unanswered. This time Monsignor Ribeiro let two months lapse before taking action and consented only when Maria went into a

fresh crisis of illness. This had been foretold as a sign to the priest that the message was from God.

Even this second communication from the Lord is not explicitly mentioned in the letters Maria wrote her spiritual director. Because it did not pertain to her spiritual life, she must have mentioned it to him verbally. Nevertheless, in a letter written in April, 1898, to complement what had been spoken about in conversation, there is a passage which seems to relate to a message concerning the desired consecration:

"After our Lord returned to invite me to suffer in reparation for sacrileges, etc., He continued, 'The watchmen of Israel are sleeping and to make up for what is missing in their vigilance and zeal I call you to prayer, to sacrifice, and to suffering. These will increase and you must prepare yourself for even greater ones.'"<sup>121</sup>

Among Maria's writings are found three which pertain to this second divine command. These are reported by Chasle, who even before his biography was published, had in 1905 given a copy of it to the editor of the French edition of the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. This periodical in its December, 1905, issue carried an article on the origins of the consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart.<sup>122</sup>

"He repeated to me what He said last year, that the decision must be left to my spiritual father. The truth will be made known to him by extraordinary sufferings. 'Consecration of the entire world to the Heart of Jesus. . . Bishops and priests will become more fervent, the just more perfect, sinners will be converted, heretics and schismatics will return to the Church. And those who are not yet born to the faith but who are called to belong to the Church, that is, pagans, will receive this grace more quickly!' His Divine Heart hungers and thirsts and desires to embrace the whole world in His love and mercy. I can appease this hunger and thirst with the help of my spiritual

father. 'Write to Rome as quickly as possible.'

"Spouse of His Divine Heart. As spouse, He asked me if I did not want to do this for Him. Could I deny Him this? Then I asked our Lord to cancel something He had asked me the other day because I was embarrassed; it did not seem to me necessary to speak about it. But he did not want to. He insisted and asked me if through fear of humiliation I would refuse Him what many others of His beloved spouses had granted Him at the cost of much humiliation and suffering."<sup>123</sup>

From the deposition given by Monsignor Ribeiro in the process, we know the date of the communication about the first letter and how it evolved.

"The second time Sister Maria received an order from our Lord to write to the Pope about the consecration of the world seemed to be the First Friday of April, 1898 (Good Friday). She asked me to write to Rome. For reasons I have already indicated concerning the first request, I hesitated to grant the permission which would include her saying that she wrote with permission of her spiritual father. Then she told me that she would have a new and very grave crisis of illness as proof and sign that the order was genuine. In fact, she did indeed become very gravely ill and her life was in danger."<sup>124</sup> I continued however to suspend judgment thinking that the change in her condition could be a result of auto-suggestion or only a passing symptom. But finally, moved by her physical suffering and desolation of mind and certainly urged by the Heart of Jesus, I decided to grant the request.

"Due to her extreme weakness she could not write and since she did not want others to know about this I had to act as secretary. Seated beside her bed I told her to dictate to me what she wanted to write to the Holy Father and I drafted a letter in pencil. On my return to the seminary I



prepared the letter for Rome, and on one of the following days I submitted this to her so that she could modify it as she wished. This she did readily, for all during her illness she maintained an extraordinary lucidity and mental balance. Finally I copied the letter which she signed in pencil. At her request I sent it to the Benedictine Abbot in Rome, Father Hildebrand Hemptinne,<sup>125</sup> begging him in Sister Maria's name to personally take the letter to the Vatican. This the prelate immediately did.<sup>126</sup>

"I do not know if the Pope attached any importance to the matter.

"I cannot remember the text of the letter but it seems to me that Sister Maria asked the Holy Father to pardon her boldness in writing to him. She humbly declared she had received an order from God and told him that abundant graces would result from the consecration-that bishops and priests would become more fervent, that sinners and non-Catholics would be converted more easily, and pagans more readily."<sup>127</sup>

The letter was not answered, but from what happened the following year, it would seem that it sowed a seed in the heart of the Pontiff, which would mature until it had borne fruit.

Apparently Maria signed the letter using only her religious name-Sister Maria of the Divine Heart. Had she added her family name, because of the esteem in which the Pontiff held the Droste zu Vischerings, most probably the letter would at least have received a simple acknowledgement through the Maestro di Camera, similar to the reply to her letter of respect written in 1895.<sup>128</sup>

### *A Visit from Her Brothers*

During a brief slacking in her illness at the end of March, 1898, Max and William visited Oporto. They stayed six days. In

the apostolic process of Munster, William gives a brief resume of his impressions."

"At that time we saw her in all her suffering and observed how, in spite of her illness, she directed the admistration of the entire house. A number of persons from the city came to visit her to seek her counsel and help. She aided the poor even though she had little to dispense to them. For herself and the house, her faith was in Saint Joseph.

"We also observed how harmoniously she lived with all the sisters and how these venerated her. Personally we had the impression that in her we were in the presence of something exceptional without being able to define exactly what it was. She did her best to hide from us anything that might be extraordinary. After we returned home from Oporto we were asked if we had observed something extraordinary. We answered that we had not observed anything extraordinary but that we had a feeling that there must be something. On that occasion we visited the Cardinal of Oporto, who praised our sister highly."<sup>129</sup>

Max died in 1938, but from his deposition during the process of 1913 it becomes clear that as Maria's twin, being closer to her than William, he learned something. Maria must have confided to him her intention of writing the Pope, without telling him the contents of the letter.<sup>130</sup> Later, there was something more explicit. In fact, later when he was putting in order the letters he had received from his sister, those which had not been destroyed in an 1899 fire at the castle of Darfeld, he came upon an autographed note from Maria which began with the words: "Tell Maximilian. . ." During the deposition Max did not specify the contents of this note but he said that the words which followed contained a revelation.<sup>131</sup>

Max's son, Father Rafael Droste zu Vischering, a priest and chaplain at the front during the Second World War, referred to

that very note during the apostolic process of 1942:

"My father showed me a little note written by my Aunt Maria at Oporto in her own handwriting: 'Tell Maximilian that he is especially dear to Me for his devotion to My most holy Mother.'

My father interpreted the sense of this phrase as a revelation Christ had made to her during the last year of her life."<sup>132</sup>

The visit from her brothers coincided with the first anniversary of the death of their sister Augusta. She wrote to Darfeld:

"Our hearts meet today. We three have had a Mass offered for her. Augusta would certainly have enjoyed seeing us together. Thank you for having sent my brothers; we are enjoying pleasant hours together. Poor Max is struggling continually to hold back tears, although I am really not so very ill. Our separation will be hard, but it will be offered to the good God."

And after their departure, in the same letter she continued:

"It did me so much good to see my brothers again. You cannot imagine their goodness towards me; they were always full of understanding. Here they won all hearts."<sup>133</sup>

### *More Pleasing to God*

It is common teaching among moral and ascetical theologians that a vow, promising freely to God something which is better than its contrary <sup>134</sup> is an excellent act of religion and gives honor and worship to God.<sup>135</sup> The three religious vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity are integral to the religious state, but there are saints and others who have made special vows to God about specific lines of action.<sup>136</sup>

Sister Maria Droste desired to make a "special" vow in order freely to renounce her personal liberty. She wanted, by this vow, to hand over to another choices which were hers by natural right. "God's representative" for her was her spiritual director.

During April 7, 1898, Maria had received a second command from Christ to write to Rome. But also at that time she received another communication.

"After that our Lord told me that I should ask your Reverence to allow me to make a special vow of obedience, as I have long desired to do. By this vow I would hand over to you, Father, all that pertains to my spiritual life, as well as all that pertains to my health in the form of remedies for relief of my illness, in so far as there is no opposition to our rule and to my vow of religious obedience. And in this way I am to honor our Lord's obedience unto death.

"Our Lord added that when you give me orders, you must always keep in mind that He has called me in a special way to an intimate love for Him and to suffering. He added that my illness has a mystical significance, the extent of which is known to Him alone."<sup>137</sup>

As before, the good priest took his time. Obedience in matters regarding her soul did not present a great problem to him but to decide regarding treatment of her illness was an imposing task. At times he would either have to decide contrary to the mystical purpose of her suffering, or else force himself to exclude or to permit some remedies which the doctors might consider useful. Time and circumstances brought light to him.

During the summer of 1898 the doctors sought a means of alleviating or at least arresting the ongoing deterioration of Maria's pain-wracked body. They thought up a new type apparatus which they felt would enable her to sit up in bed instead of always remaining in a prone position. The "apparatus"

turned out to be a horrible appliance. A ring of iron encircled her head and two steel supports were passed under the armpits, supposedly to hold her body erect. However, since her spinal column was useless for support, the poor patient found herself suspended from these metal mechanisms. Weak as she was, she suffered an intense agony instead of finding relief. She was incapable of doing anything in that position. Her hands became swollen and purple; defective circulation brought her to the limits of her endurance. The sisters could not bear to see their superior tortured in this way and ran from the room weeping. They said that it was like seeing a martyr on the rack.

In this, Maria's obedience was heroic. She had felt only fear and deep repugnance for this treatment when it was proposed to her but she consulted her confessor and when he advised that she submit to it, she did so. But now, seeing in what it consisted and how the patient suffered as a result, after it was tried for the fifth time, Monsignor Ribeiro asked that it be stopped. The doctors, too, realized that 'it was better to desist as the patient did not have the strength to support the instrument.'<sup>138</sup>

His decision to suspend use of this apparatus coupled with other circumstances convinced Monsignor Ribeiro that he should grant Maria permission to make the special vow of obedience to him which she had several times requested. Dom Chas1e reports:

"When our Lord wanted to ask Sister Maria of the Divine Heart to take a fresh step in the path of sacrifice and to accomplish something great for His glory and the good of souls, He caused her to taste the delights of Tabor, after which she ascended to a fresh Calvary of which He had always spoken to her, even during periods of consolation."<sup>139</sup>

Monsignor Ribeiro later made a similar reflection. He spoke of this during the deposition, after having mentioned the last message Maria received regarding the consecration of the world

to His Sacred Heart.

"God in His wisdom prepared His ambassadress. In addition to trying her ever more in suffering, He inspired two things:

"The first was that she made a vow of obedience to her spiritual director regarding all that he might command in the line of spiritual direction and also anything referring to her illness, in so far as it would not be contrary to the rules of the Congregation and to her religious vows.

"The second was that she request not only permission for more prolonged prayer before the eighth of December but also that both she and her spiritual director should consecrate themselves to His Sacred Heart, since both of them, as is apparent in the letter of November 20, 1898, should abandon themselves to Him so that He might dispose of them according to His Will."<sup>140</sup>

The two aspects of the vow of obedience to her spiritual director were made separately on the 1st of November and the 21st of November, 1898. Once again Maria had a slight improvement in her health and by being carried on a stretcher was able to attend some conferences of the community retreat being held in preparation for the feast of the Presentation of Mary, November 21.

The consecration to the Sacred Heart made by Maria and her confessor took place November 20.

"On that day, November 20, I went to the Good Shepherd in late afternoon and found Sister Maria in the chapel where she had been carried on her little bed. After having made her confession she gave me a paper on which she had written an act of consecration. She asked me to examine it. I looked at it and found it to be all right. I then knelt and recited with her the same act of

consecration. I read and she repeated each word. This act of consecration is now well known and used in several parts of the world."<sup>141</sup>

Monsignor Ribeiro concludes:

"Thus ended the preparation willed by our Lord in order that Sister Maria might be, as the Lord had promised, an ever more ready instrument in His hands."<sup>142</sup>

### *A Second Letter to Rome*

A second letter was written December 8, 1898, feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. Jesus had confided a fresh message to Maria the day before. She wrote Monsignor Ribeiro:

"I explained to our Lord the difficulty that I find in writing and making everything clear. He replied that I should not fear because it would be He who would do it and I would only have to write what He inspired so that it would be quite evident that He helped me. And so it was. I wrote with great facility, almost without thinking."<sup>143</sup>

Here is the text of the letter:

"Most Holy Father.

"In deep confusion I come to the feet of your Holiness to humbly beg permission to speak to you again on the subject about which I wrote you last June. At that time I was recovering from a very grave illness and my strength only allowed me to dictate a letter. Now I can at least write in pencil, though I am still very ill and bedridden. In my last letter I confided to your Holiness some of the graces which our Lord in His infinite mercy has deigned to grant me, notwithstanding my unworthiness. To my confusion, I confess to your Holiness that He continues to treat me with the same mercy. By our Lord's express order and with the consent of my confessor, I come in deep respect and

perfect submission to make known to your Holiness some new communications which our Lord has deigned to give me regarding the matter treated in my last letter.

"Last summer while your Holiness was suffering from a sickness which because of your advanced age filled the hearts of your children with anxiety, I was greatly consoled to learn from our Lord that He intended to extend your life in order to bring about the consecration of the whole world to His Sacred Heart. He told me that in order to grant you this great grace (of making the consecration) He had prolonged your life and that after accomplishing the desire of His Heart, your Holiness should prepare yourself. . . and He continued. . . 'In My Heart. . . consolation. . . a secure refuge in death and at the judgment.' He left me with the impression that after the consecration you would soon finish your earthly pilgrimage.

"On the vigil of the Immaculate Conception our Lord caused me to understand that by means of this new development in devotion to His Divine Heart, He would enlighten the whole world with new light. These words of the third Mass of Christmas penetrated my heart: 'Quia hodie descendit lux magna super terram.' ('For this day a great light has appeared upon the earth.') I seemed (interiorly) to see rays descend from this light, the Heart of Jesus, that adorable Sun, and spread over the earth, first weakly then ever brighter and brighter until the world was illuminated. And He said to me, 'Peoples and nations will be enlightened by the splendor of this light and warmed by the intense heat of its rays.' I understood the ardent desire He has that His adorable Heart may be glorified more and more and made better known and that He would spread His gifts and blessings over the entire world. For this, He has chosen your Holiness, prolonging your days so that you might give Him this honor, console His afflicted Heart and draw down on your own soul those choice graces which flow from His Divine Heart, the source of every



grace, the dwelling place of peace and happiness. I feel unworthy to communicate all this to your Holiness but our Lord, after having shown me clearly my own misery and after having caused me to renew an offering of myself as victim and spouse of His Heart, accepting willingly all kinds of suffering, humiliation, and contempt, gave me a strict order to write to your Holiness on this subject.

"It might seem strange that our Lord should ask for the consecration of the whole world and not be content with the consecration of the Catholic Church. But His desire to reign, to be loved and glorified and to inflame all hearts with His love and His mercy is so intense that He wants your Holiness to offer Him the hearts of all those who, through Baptism, belong to Him that they may more easily return to the true Church. He also wishes to hasten the spiritual birth of the non-baptised who have not yet partaken of the spiritual life and yet for whom He gave His life and shed His blood, and therefore has equally called to be one day children of Holy Church.

"In my letter of last June, I explained the graces that our Lord wishes to grant because of this consecration and the manner in which He wishes it to be made. But in view of the recent earnest appeal made by our Lord, I, with filial submission, earnestly beg your Holiness to grant our Lord the consolation He asks for and to add still greater splendor to the worship of His Divine Heart according to the inspiration He will give you. Our Lord spoke to me directly only about the consecration but on various occasions He has manifested to me His burning desire that His Heart might be more greatly loved and glorified for the good of nations. It seems to me that He would be greatly pleased if your Holiness, by an exhortation to the clergy and faithful and by granting new indulgences, were to increase the devotion of the First Fridays of the month. When our Lord spoke to me about the consecration, He did not expressly say this, but without being able to assert it

positively I thought I understood this ardent desire of His Heart.

"After having laid all this before your Holiness, in all sincerity and simplicity, I have only to ask you..., most holy Father, to pardon my boldness and to accept the homage of my filial devotion to Holy Church and to the person of your Holiness, to whom I submit in obedience.

"Most holy Father, I beg you to send your blessing not only to our sisters and to our girls but also to her who. . . has the honor of signing herself,

Your humble and unworthy daughter,  
Sister Maria of the Divine Heart  
Droste zu Vischering

Superior of the Convent of the Good Shepherd of Oporto  
Oporto (Portugal) January 6, 1899 <sup>144</sup>

The rough draft of the above letter is dated December 8, but the copy sent to Rome bore the date 'January 6, 1899.' Monsignor Ribeiro, when he approved sending a second letter, wanted it to go on the feast of the Epiphany. It seemed to him appropriate that the consecration of the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus should be requested "on the feast of the first manifestation of Jesus Christ to the nations and of the first adoration of the latter of the Savior of humanity."<sup>145</sup>

This letter like the preceeding one was sent to Dom Hildebrand Hemptinne, who in turn delivered it personally to the Vatican on January 15.<sup>146</sup>

Reply from the Vatican

The announcement that the world would definitely be consecrated to the Sacred Heart was made personally by the Pope to Monsignor Doutreloux, Bishop of Liege, Belgium. Leo XIII, in the course of a private audience given that prelate in April,

1899, said to him, "We are about to perform the greatest act of our Pontificate."<sup>147</sup> Monsignor T'Serclaes, biographer of Leo XIII, records that the Bishop of Liege, on leaving that audience, confidentially repeated to him, with words full of emotion, what the Pope had told him. "There are in the world," said Leo XIII, "some holy souls who receive communications from Heaven and sometimes the Pope is so convinced of these that he cannot doubt that they come from God. What would you say for example if someone made known to you a thought that you had wanted to hide in the very depths of your heart without letting anyone know about it? Would you not see in this a proof of divine intervention? Well, this is what happened when the consecration of the universe to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was spoken of."<sup>148</sup>

Apparently, the Pontiff had his own private inspiration. Sister Maria Droste was only the instrument or *prompter* who led Leo XIII to take action. Had not Jesus told her all this on December 7th? Her simple request had immediate effect.

On January 26, barely eleven days after her letter had been delivered to the Vatican, Cardinal Jacobini, who until the previous year had been Apostolic Nuncio to Portugal, wrote Monsignor Ribeiro asking him to give detailed information about Sister Maria Droste zu Vischering 'on behalf of a person in a high position.'<sup>149</sup> The information requested was sent to Cardinal Jacobini on February 18, 1899.

"I am well acquainted with the superior of the Good Shepherd of Oporto because I have been confessor to the community. I know that many persons esteem her as an excellent religious. Among these was our deceased Cardinal, D. Americo, Bishop of Oporto. The resignation and joy of Sister Maria of the Divine Heart in the midst of suffering and her zeal and charity edify others. I myself recognize in her a soul who throughout her life has received abundant graces from Heaven and who has a sincere desire to grow in holiness in a spirit of sacrifice and obedience. Moreover she venerates Church authority and

all that concerns the Holy See.

"With regard to the communication she believes to have received from our Lord, I neither presume nor permit myself to judge. It seems to me:

"First, that it is probable that this good soul may receive communications which are truly supernatural. Her virtue, the cross of a long and painful illness to which our Lord has called her for sometime, the spiritual favors she has received, the repugnance which she has about referring to these, and, nevertheless, the prompt obedience with which she tells them to her spiritual director-all point toward this probability.

"Secondly. It is also possible that mixed with true heavenly communication is something of her own natural imagination. The frequency of the communications she reports and the natural tendencies of her mind make this probable.

"However, notwithstanding these reflections, I do not venture to pass judgment on these matters which require great prudence and circumspection."<sup>150</sup>

Even before this reply was sent, the Pope on February 12, in an audience given Monsignor Isoard, Bishop of Annecy, spoke about the consecration of the Church and the world during the coming holy year of 1900.<sup>151</sup>

*First Friday of March, 1899*

While between Rome and Oporto events were moving, Maria received a foretaste of the joy that would be realized on the coming feast of the Sacred Heart. Towards the end of February the Congregation of the Good Shepherd of Angers was allowed public recitation of the litany of the Sacred Heart in the churches and chapels of the Institute.

"Did I not tell you at the beginning of this year," exclaimed Sister Droste when she received the news, "that a year of mercy of the Heart of Jesus had arrived? What great graces and what great proofs of the infinite love of our Lord! May we be made worthy through humility of heart to work with Him for the salvation of souls."<sup>152</sup>

Dom Chasle records the introduction of the litany at the Good Shepherd of Oporto:

"Sister Maria of the Divine Heart fixed the First Friday of March for the inauguration of this devotion, and planned that it be carried out with the greatest possible splendor. She had the litany printed in Latin and Portuguese, and the sisters immediately began practising the music. The small harmonium was brought near her bed and she herself presided at the singing practice, helping the sisters and singing fervently with them. The chapel was decorated as for a major feast.

"When the First Friday came, the Abbot of Seckau, who happened to be in Oporto, celebrated Mass at the Good Shepherd. As he was approaching the altar he was given a note from the superior: 'Will you kindly say Mass in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for the extension of His Kingdom in the way He desires and that we may find our dwelling in His Heart for time and eternity?' He complied.

"For the Benediction service, the vice-rector of the seminary presided and the Abbot was present, kneeling at the Gospel side of the altar. When the sister-chanters intoned the *Kyrie eleison* beginning the litany, he was greatly surprised to hear a clear, loud voice above all the others, the voice of a person enthusiastically pouring out her very self. It was the dying superior and in this manner she sang, in clear, joyous notes, the thirty-three invocations of the litany. This was she who could not bear to have her head even touched, so great was the pain and

who when raising or turning her head had to join her hands under her neck in order to do so . . .

"The Abbot's first reaction was to regret so much effort from one so gravely ill. This feeling, however, quickly gave way to one of deep religious emotion, and he had difficulty controlling his own emotion.

"When the service was over and he met her in the parlor, he gently reproved her. She replied, 'I could not have done otherwise, even if I had died while singing.' "<sup>153</sup>

### *Gratitude to Leo XIII*

Towards the end of February, 1899, Leo XIII, who was nearing his ninetieth birthday, fell gravely ill. On March 1st medical doctors decided they should operate. However, they were unable to administer an anesthetic because they feared his heart was not sufficiently strong. The whole Catholic world was anxious and prayed for him. And Sister Maria of the Divine Heart, who had not yet received an answer to her petition, was deeply concerned, too. Would all hope for the desired consecration fade away? It was the sweet and mysterious voice which spoke to her internally which encouraged her to trust.

Leo XIII courageously faced the dreaded surgery. A large tumor was removed without any ensuing complications and within a few days he was declared out of danger. He received many testimonies of veneration and affection during his convalescence. The Pontiff attributed his recovery to prayer. Certainly, too, he must have recalled that significant message sent him by the Sister in Oporto, that our Lord would prolong his life in order to give him the privilege of solemnly consecrating the human race to His Sacred Heart.<sup>154</sup>

During his convalescence the Pope again took up the matter of Sister Maria's letter and passed it for examination to Cardinal Mazzella, S.J., theologian and Prefect of the Sacred

Congregation of Rites. The Cardinal returned the letter to the Pontiff on March 25, saying, "It is a touching letter and certainly seems to have been dictated by our Lord."<sup>155</sup>

Nevertheless the consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart could not be based on a message said to have been received from Heaven by a private person. "The greatest act of my pontificate," Leo XIII reflected, "must have a theological base."

After a few days study, Cardinal Mazzella placed before the Pope the doctrine of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who distinguishes in the Kingdom of God between those who are subjects "*quantum ad executionem potestatis*," that is, those who obey the Lord; and between those who are subject to Him only *quantum ad potestatem*, that is, without knowing the Lord. These latter remain outside His fold and yet are subject to Him, whether they want to be or not, and they cannot exempt themselves of an obligation of returning to Him. This exposition of Aquinas' doctrine would be cited in the encyclical by which Leo XIII would announce the consecration of the human race to the Sacred Heart.

On Easter Sunday, April 2, 1899, Cardinal Mazzella in his capacity of Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, signed a decree which declared that Pope Leo XIII, by his authority, granted that the litany of the Sacred Heart could be recited or sung in public, just as could that of the Name of Jesus. But that was not all. After enumerating the Holy Father's motives for this new permission, the document continued: "Furthermore, his Holiness. . . moved by his ardent devotion to the most loving Heart of Jesus, as also by his desire to provide a remedy for the many evils which afflict us and which are increasing day by day, intends to consecrate the whole world to the Sacred Heart. And to give greater solemnity to this consecration, his Holiness is ordering as soon as possible a preparatory triduum, during which this litany will be sung."<sup>156</sup>

The following letter was sent from the Vatican to Monsignor Ribeiro on April 20:

"The Holy Father has asked me to send you the enclosed two copies of a decree issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, as directed by his Holiness, with a request that you give them to the Reverend Mother Maria of the Divine Heart Droste zu Vischering.

"His Holiness likewise sends you and the above named Reverend Mother his Apostolic Blessing.

"Rinaldo Angeli, Chaplain to his Holiness."<sup>157</sup>

It would seem that the Pope wished, by sending copies of the decree, to give Sister Droste an official reply to her letter to him and also to acquaint her with his decision to consecrate the world to the Sacred Heart. In gratitude, Maria wrote the Pontiff:

"Most Holy Father,

"Yesterday, Canon Theotônio Manoel Vieira de Castro Ribeiro gave me two copies of the decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites which your Holiness in your fatherly kindness sent me, authorizing the public recitation of the litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and announcing the coming solemn consecration of the entire world to the same Divine Heart. Humbled and embarrassed by this attention shown me by your Holiness, I prostrate myself at your feet to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Most holy Father, it would be impossible for me to express the sentiments of confusion and deep gratitude which fill my soul. On the one side, is my unworthiness and my lowliness and on the other, a torrent of grace and the precious remembrance with which your Holiness has consoled the most unworthy of your daughters. What treasures are contained in this decree which your Holiness has sent me! The Vicar of Christ remembers a poor religious, and, in sending her his blessing, confirms so to



say the favors which the Divine Spouse in His mercy has granted her! Ah! truly I am not worthy of such great grace. Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.

"And what a consolation is this decree! The Divine Heart of Jesus had inspired your Holiness with a strong and holy determination to correspond to His ardent desire by consecrating the whole world to Him. May He be forever praised! The hidden delights of His adorable Heart will inundate your soul and He will not fail to keep the promises He has made.

"Recently, when your Holiness was so seriously ill, my weak faith made me tremble for fear that the consecration would not be made. I poured out my sorrow to my Divine Spouse and He consoled me, assuring me that He would preserve your life so that the desires of His Heart would be accomplished. He told me that now the consecration was well on its way. Then He added, 'Trust in Me. My Heart will reign; My Heart will triumph.' In sending me the decree, your Holiness announces to me the dawn of this triumph. Should I not therefore be full of joy and happiness?

"I beg your Holiness today to receive the simple thanks of my grateful heart and the assurance of my submission to your Holiness. And I beg you to bless her who... is happy to call herself,

Your most humble and obedient daughter,  
Maria of the Divine Heart  
Droste zu Vischering

Superior of the Convent of the Good Shepherd of Oporto  
Oporto, April 27, 1899158

This letter sent via Monsignor Angeli was given to his Holiness on May 7, 1899.

## *Four Predictions*

Some of Maria's divine communications referred to the future. Fulfillment of one of these convinced the sceptical Monsignor Ribeiro. He saw three predictions confirmed by events of Maria's life and a fourth was confirmed after her death. He spoke explicitly of these in his deposition during the process.

The first prediction concerned what Maria wrote him in her letter of the 20th and 21st of November, 1896 ". . . it is useless to think that I will walk again." It is a documented fact that from then until her death she could not use her limbs.

The second prediction was the assurance that she would be able to receive Holy Communion every day until the day of her death. This she did, even during the worst periods of her illness, even until the day she died.

The third concerned the date of the consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart. In a letter of January 1, 1899, she explicitly mentions that the year just beginning was a year of the mercy of the Heart of Jesus on the world and that this year had been chosen by our Lord for the consecration. On January 1 the Pope could not have thought of the consecration taking place that year, all the more so, because he had not yet received her letter sent from Oporto after the 6th of January.

The fourth prediction concerned the person of the spiritual director. On the feast of the Annunciation, Maria surprised him by an announcement. He was visiting her and during the conversation she said to him, as though it was the most natural thing in the world, that in a short time he would be a bishop. Monsignor Ribeiro presumably paid no attention to this, attributing the statement to the esteem she had for him. Several weeks later, however, she repeated the prediction with even greater emphasis, adding, "But that will be after my death." This time he took it as a joke.

She then said to him: "Our Lord told me that you should take care of your health, that He has called you to a higher office for the glory of God and you must spare yourself. One day you will be a bishop but then I will no longer be living.

Your nomination will come shortly after my death. At first I doubted that this was truly our Lord speaking to me and thought perhaps it was an illusion but then immediately I experienced that inner conviction that leaves no room for doubt."

Monsignor Ribeiro must have been amazed when, as the Servant of God was nearing her end, he was informed of his coming nomination as bishop of Mylapore in India. Four days after her death, the day following the consecration of the world, his nomination was signed by King Charles I and later, canonically confirmed by the Holy Father, Leo XIII.<sup>159</sup>

### *The Date of the Consecration*

Some circumstances are indifferent in themselves but in the carrying out of God's designs seem preordained. In May, 1899, the Count and Countess Droste zu Vischering were again on pilgrimage to Rome. On May 18 they were received in private audience by Leo XIII. They did not know that the family name was at that very time on the desks of prelates in the Vatican. Their audience with the Pope is memorable. Following it, the Countess made notes of their conversation with Leo XIII so that her husband could later write an account of it. His account is carefully preserved in the archives of the Droste family and was disclosed in the deposition made during the process by Count Clement Augusto von Galen, Bishop of Munster and Maria's cousin. The document is almost a recording of the conversation between the Pope and the Drostes.

"The Holy Father received us very affably, extending his hand and saying, 'Oh! Droste zu Vischering, Droste zu Vischering.. .' We kissed his hand and his foot, expressing our joy in finding him completely recovered from his recent illness.

"God has preserved my life so that I might serve Him yet longer in the Church. When one is in a position such as this, one's life must be spent to the very end for the Church.'

. . . Remembrance of Cardinal Droste zu Vischering, as in other audiences.

(Countess) 'Holy Father, a blessing please for my youngest daughter who is ill.'

'I will pray for her and I send her my blessing. Have you many children?'

'Yes, three who are married, two sons and a daughter. They too have children. And two daughters who are still at home. Our two sons are chamberlains to your Holiness.'

'And then we also have a daughter who has been suffering for a long time. She is a Religious of the Good Shepherd and is in Portugal.'

At this point the Holy Father's expression visibly brightened. Until then he had sat leaning back in his armchair but now he leaned toward us and said with unconcealed interest, 'Is it your daughter?' . . . 'I congratulate you. She is privileged soul. She has written many things and the Cardinal of Oporto has spoken to me about her. She has supernatural lights. What do you think?'

'Holy Father, we hardly know what to reply.'

'We asked information about her from those who direct her, for we wanted to make a better judgment. Tell me, tell me... what was she like when she was a child, say at ten years of age?'

(Countess) - 'She was like the others, quite joyful, vivacious, very intelligent but she did not particularly

impress us. However, at her birth on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, I received an unexplicable joy. As Maria was a twin, her brother being born just before her, I asked myself to which of the two should be attributed the reason for my joy... Later, she spent two years at a boarding school conducted by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Riedenburg. It was there that she decided about her vocation, as she herself told me. But even from her first Communion she had thought of consecrating herself to God.' While she was still young, about twenty years of age, she heard interiorly but very distinctly, while she was in prayer in our chapel at Darfeld, these mysterious words: 'You will be the spouse of My Heart.'

The Holy Father interrupted. 'How do you know that?' 'She confided this to me during the summer of 1896, when we went to Portugal.'

The Holy Father went on. 'I'm interested in knowing details about her youth. How was her health? Always well? Innocent?'

'The world never touched her heart.'

(Count) 'We were living in the country. Maria was always well protected. She had a great devotion towards Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.'

(Countess) - 'And a great love for prayer and the interior life.'

(Count) - 'She took care of our chapel. She was the sacristan and she formed a little choir among the servants. She herself directed this choir for the singing during the Liturgy.'

The Holy Father wanted to know in which convent of the Good Shepherd she had entered, why she had been sent to Oporto, and if we still went to visit her.

After a moment of reflective hesitation, the Holy Father continued: 'Nothing is official yet, but during the next few days an encyclical will announce to all the *bishops*, priests and faithful the consecration of the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It will be done most solemnly in all the cathedrals, churches and chapels. From it I hope for the greatest blessings of God upon our world. I made this decision following communications from your daughter.'

The Holy Father continued in a solemn tone. 'I am informing you of this in advance and I command you to write to her *either* today or tomorrow that on the 9th, 10th, and 11th of June the whole world will celebrate a solemn triduum and the consecration will be made on the 11th in all the cathedrals, churches and chapels of the world. The litany of the Sacred Heart which I approved will be sung during the Liturgy. During those days, I will celebrate Mass not in my private chapel but in the Pauline chapel in the presence of the cardinals and the entire curia. WRITE THIS TO HER, all of this as I have told it to you, and tell her that I made this decision following what she made known to me and that I expect the greatest graces for the whole world.'

'You will write all this, will you not? And you will tell her also that I received you with a very paternal welcome.'

As we knelt, the Holy Father put his left hand on Clement's shoulder and his right on mine and repeated, 'Write to her and tell her that I send a very special blessing to her. I see her kneeling here together with you at my feet.. '

And then followed the request for blessings for the entire household.<sup>160</sup>

On the evening of that same day, May 18, 1899, a telegram from the Count arrived in Oporto, bearing a very special blessing

from the Holy Father. On the 24th of May, Maria received a letter containing a detailed account of the papal audience, just as the Pope had asked. Maria opened the letter and surmised everything from the first line. Overcome, she stopped reading and waited until Monsignor Ribeiro came, to first make it known to him. He did not understand German but he could read French, the language in which the words of the Holy Father were reported by her parents. She had to read and translate for him the rest, which was in German, and she did this only with great difficulty because her eyes had become very weak and she could hardly decipher the letters.<sup>161</sup>

### *Eternal Nuptials*

On that same day, May 24, Sister Maria had another painful attack which the doctors thought would cause her death. In a spasm resulting from this attack, a muscle in her neck became paralyzed, leaving her head in a twisted and blocked position on the left side. Her eyesight vanished almost completely, as well as her hearing. In all of this, she remained totally conscious.

After reading her parents' letter she experienced two conflicting sentiments—one of indescribable happiness; the other of embarrassment. Ingenuously she said to Monsignor Ribeiro, "I am overwhelmed!"

Embarrassed and overwhelmed by what? Perhaps because she now knew her secrets were known to others. Monsignor Ribeiro was not able to reassure her by saying that information had been asked only of him, so he limited himself to replying that she should not think of such things and that she should place herself in the hands of Providence.<sup>162</sup>

The encyclical "Annum Sacrum" with the official announcement of the consecration was promulgated on May 25. On the 26th, Monsignor Ribeiro told her this. Despite her critical condition, she asked him to let the Church authorities in Oporto know in time because the archdiocesan see was vacant following

the death of the Cardinal and she feared that the encyclical might arrive in Oporto too late to be published in the diocese before the feast of the Sacred Heart. How important it was that the consecration be made with full solemnity in Oporto itself.

And so, when the official text of the encyclical arrived in Oporto on June 2nd, everything was in readiness. The Vicar General himself went to Sister Maria to submit to her the program for the solemn celebration. She said to him:

"God has entrusted me with telling you that He desires that the consecration be made with the greatest possible solemnity in Oporto. Do not fear doing too much because later on the fruits will be visible."<sup>163</sup>

The woman speaking was close to her last agony. On June 6 the Holy Father chose to give her another delicate and special attention. Through Monsignor Ribeiro, the Apostolic Nuncio in Lisbon sent her two copies of the encyclical in Italian, by personal order of the Pope.<sup>164</sup> But by now, Maria was approaching the end.

During the night between June 7 and 8 she had her final attack and Monsignor Ribeiro hastened to administer Holy Viaticum to her for the last time. Still, in the morning, she was bright and cheerful and tried to console the sisters.

In the course of the morning she interested herself in preparations for the feast of the Sacred Heart and for the consecration. She had several statues of the Sacred Heart brought to her room. From these she chose one, indicated in which part of the garden it should be placed and where the procession would make a short stop during the consecration ceremony.

The girls offered her the gift they had prepared for her feastday—a large banner of the Sacred Heart which they had embroidered. She was immensely pleased and asked that the girls be told how very grateful she was. Then, turning to the sister



infirm arians, who had assisted her lovingly and selflessly, she assured them that she would never forget them either in time or in eternity. Two of the religious who more than the others had her affection and confidence-the assistant superior, Sister Mary Annunciation, and the director of the girls' section, Sister Mary of Jesus (the latter succeeded her as superior) knelt beside her and asked her to bless them. The dying superior raised her hands but they were trembling so that the sisters began to cry. Smiling kindly, she tried to console them. "Don't cry; my hands are trembling but it is only a passing weakness." Then she spoke to them of the Sacred Heart and of her love for Him, as though to encourage them for the last time and to share with them the love which was within her.<sup>165</sup>

At noon she took a turn for the worse. Dom Ruas, founder of the Good Shepherd in Oporto, visited her but she hardly recognized him. Towards two o'clock, Monsignor Ribeiro returned. He heard her confession for the last time and gave her the blessing for the dying. Sister Maria gave him a copy of the encyclical sent her by the Pope. He asked her on what day she would like to die. She replied immediately, "I always wished and often prayed to our Lord that I might die on a First Friday or on the feast of the Sacred Heart." "Rejoice then because your wish may be granted and you may have the happiness of celebrating this beautiful feast in Heaven." The face of the dying nun became wreathed in a joyous smile.

Death did not seem imminent and Monsignor Ribeiro left, intending to return a few hours later. But quite suddenly Maria lost her speech. "I would like to receive Communion" were her last words.<sup>166</sup> With her profession crucifix in her hands, her gaze on a fixed point, from her lips there escaped what was almost a moan. . . "Ah!" . . . and then her face became radiant. From her eyes two tears fell, and her soul left her tortured body to go to the embrace of her spouse.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday, June 8, 1899, First Vespers of the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER IV

1. Chasle, Abbe Louis. *Sister Mary of the Divine Heart*. London: Burns & Oates, Ltd. 1907, p. 143.
2. See Chapter III. pp. 54-55.
3. Kerdreux, Michel de. *Comme line Flamme*. Caslerman: Editions Salvator, Mulhouse. 1968. p. 148.
4. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
5. *Ibid*, p. 148, 149.
6. *Ibid*, p. 149, 150.
7. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
8. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
9. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
10. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
11. *Ibid*, p. 155.
12. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
13. *Ibid*, p. 152, 153.
14. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
15. Antonia died when she was 15, on October 17, 1800. In her autobiography Sister Maria tells that the room where she died was the same room in which Augusta, the eldest, also died. Her mother had special veneration for this room and afterwards would not permit anyone else to live there. c.f. Autobiography, p. 234 f.
16. Apostolic Process of Oporto, p. 250.
17. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
18. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
19. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 53.
20. Apostolic Process of Oporlo, p. 137.
21. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 96.
22. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 45.
23. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 281.
24. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
25. *Ibid*, p. 164.
26. *Ibid*, p. 164.
27. Apostolic Process of Arras, pp. 11, 13.
28. *Ibid*, p. 14-15.

29. Ricciardi, *B. Massimilano Maria Kolbe*, Roma, 1971, p. 312.
30. *Positio* of the writings, p. 3.
31. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 169-170.
32. *Ibid*, p. 170, 171.
33. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 46.
34. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
35. *Ibid*, p. 175, 176.
36. Apostolic Process of Fribourg, p. 7 f.
37. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 65.
38. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
39. Elizabeth was then 12 years old.
40. The Countess obtained from the Pope an autographed blessing for Maria.
41. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 180-181.
42. Marin, A. Royo, *Teologia della pertezione cristiana*, E./P. 1961, p. 997.
43. Letter, "TeSfem benevolentiae," of Cardinal Gibbons as cited, p. 978.
44. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
45. Apostolic Process of Fribourg, p. 7.
46. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 201, 202.
47. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 155.
48. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
49. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 57.
50. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
51. *Ibid*, p. 188.
52. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
53. Apostolic Process of Arras, pp. 10 and 14.
54. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
55. *Ibid*, p. 204.
56. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 80.
57. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 43 f.
58. *Ibid*, p. 46 f.
59. Investigatory Process of Angers, p. 642.
60. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 95.
61. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
62. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 86.

63. St. Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, p. 7.
64. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
65. *Ibid*, p. 259, 260.
66. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 265.
67. *Ibid*, p. 305.
68. *Ibid*, p. 324.
69. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 46.
70. Apostolic Process of Oporto. p. 275.
71. Ordinary Process of Oporto. p. 368. 369.
72. Apostolic Process of Oporto. p. 208.
73. See Chapter IV p. 81.
74. Chasle, *op. cit.* pp. 211. 212. 213.
75. *Ibid*, p. 214.
76. *Ibid*, p. 215.
77. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 82. At another time Maria said,  
     "I love Germany with a natural love. but I love Portugal  
     with a supernatural love and that is higher than the  
     former." (cL Chasle, p. 260, 261.)
78. Chasle. *op. cit.* pp. 222, 223.
79. Kerdreux, *op. cit.* p. 202.
80. The force of this desire of Maria is used as the title of  
     the French hagiography. *Comme Une Flamme* (cf.  
     Kerdreux, *op. cit.*)
81. Monsignor Teutonio Ribeiro Vieira de Castro (1859-  
     1940), was ordained a priest in Rome where he  
     received a doctorate in theology and in canon law from  
     the Gregorian University. In 1899 he was named  
     bishop of Mylapore in India, and in 1929 was made  
     Archbishop of Goa and Patriarch of East India.
82. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 71. Monsignor Riheiro  
     provided for the process 50 letters written him by  
     Maria, as well as the original autobiography written for  
     him in Portuguese.
83. *Ibid*, p. 131.
84. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

85. Her brothers Max and William remained at Darfeld where Augusta was very ill.
86. Kerdreux, *op. cif.*, p. 205.
87. *Ibid*, p. 208.
88. See Chapter 11. pp. 34-35.
89. Autobiography, pp. 185-189.
90. A. Royo Marin, p. 1067.
91. *Ibid*, p. 1073.
92. Chasle, *op. cif.*, p. 49.
93. See Chapter I. p. 14.
94. Ordinary Process of Oporto. p. 123, 135.
95. *The Pafroness of America*, Ed. Getin., Madrid, 1928, p. 55
96. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 141, 142.
97. See Chapter IV, p. 113.
98. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 225, 226.
99. See Chapter IV, p. 118.
100. Investigatory Process of Bratislavia, p. 682.
101. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 131 and following.
102. *Ibid*, p. 81.
103. *Ibid*, p. 156.
104. Ricciardi, *Bt. Massimiliano Maria Kotbe*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
105. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 127.
106. Autobiography, p. 233 and 234.
107. Kerdreux, p. 212.
108. Chalse, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
109. *Ibid*, p. 247, 248.
110. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 104.
111. *Ibid*, p. 143-145.
112. *Ibid*, p. 149.
113. *Ibid*, p. 163-164.
114. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 320.
115. *Ibid*, p. 320.
116. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 153.
117. *Ibid*, p. 76.
118. *Ibid*, p. 76.
119. *Ibid*, p. 152.
120. *Ibid*, p. 80.

121. *Ibid*, p. 175.
122. *Ibid*, p. 141-142.
123. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 340, 341.
124. *Ibid*, p. 342.
125. He belonged to the Benedictine congregation of which Ildefonso Schober was abbot.
126. This article in the French *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, says that the letter of June 14 was presented to the Holy Father with an attached note, "from a pious person desiring to obey an order received from Heaven."
127. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 96.
128. See Chapter IV, p. 96.
129. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 77.
130. Investigatory Process of Munster, p. 510.
131. *Ibid*, p. 510 f.
132. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 137 f.
133. Kerdreux, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
134. St. Thomas, Summa, II-II question 88.
135. A. Royo Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 670.
136. St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Andrew Avellino and others.
137. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 174.
138. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 330, 331.
139. *Ibid*, p. 318.
140. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 118.
141. *Ibid*, p. 119.
142. *Ibid*, p. 119.
143. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 154.
144. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 352-357.
145. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 112.
146. *Ibid*, p. 112
147. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 374, 375.
148. From *Life of Sister Mary of the Divine Heart Droste zu Vischering*, Rome, Officium Libri Catholici, 1944, p. 266.
149. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 115. The Cardinal Archbishop of Oporto, Americo Ferreiro dos Santos Silva, died January 24 of that year. Cardinal Jacobini

- personally knew Monsignor Ribeiro. In the letter he referred erroneously to Sister Maria as superior of the Carmelite convent. In a letter of February 12 he was more precise, noting that she was superior of the Good Shepherd.
150. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 118.
  151. Cf. *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, French edition, of 1905, p. 748.
  152. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 360, 361.
  153. *Ibid*, p. 361, 362.
  154. *Ibid*, p. 367, 368.
  155. *Ibid*, p. 368.
  156. *Ibid*, p. 370, 371.
  157. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 148.
  158. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 372-374.
  159. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 89.
  160. Apostolic Process of Munster, p. 30-33.
  161. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 391, 392, 393.
  162. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 130.
  163. Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 130.
  164. *Ibid*, p. 130.
  165. Chasle, *op. cit.*, p. 398.
  166. The last writings of Sister Maria end with the words "My Father, I suffer much. Pray for me that I may always be united to the Divine Heart of Jesus." (Ordinary Process of Oporto, p. 101). Her last written and spoken words, when considered together, reflect her constant desire to be united to the Heart of Jesus, adored in the Blessed Sacrament.

## Chapter V

### THE WITNESS AND MESSAGE OF BLESSED MARIA DROTE

Holiness is conformity to Christ. To this conformity which is holiness are called all "the followers of Christ, not according to their accomplishments but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus and through baptism sought in faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy."<sup>1</sup>

Our human weakness can interfere with this marvelous call, but His mercy is ever there, ready to make up more than any difference. Further, He provides us with the incentive of the lives of others, in a special way of the example of His saints.<sup>2</sup> So it is by means of beatifications and canonizations, the Church aims to stimulate the People of God toward perseverance and growth in the grace of baptism.

Over and over the Church proposes to us exceptional Christians who during their lives clearly witnessed to His work of holiness in them, Christians who lived out the Gospel message according to the gifts and circumstances which characterized their persons and way of life. They advanced "in the path of a living faith which arouses hope and works through charity."<sup>3</sup>

On November 1, 1975, Maria Droste zu Vischering, together with four others,<sup>4</sup> was proclaimed Blessed by Pope Paul VI. It is always difficult to pinpoint the Christian witness of saints. People are often impressed by one or other dramatic episode without looking at the entire life of the saint, but only after a long and painful ascesis does that growth in holiness which is sanctity normally take place. Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering deserves the veneration of the People of God for two reasons:



1. By the witness of her life, which from birth to death was lived in the reality of the Gospel, first as a noblewoman and then as a religious.
2. By the ecclesial message entrusted to her at the conclusion of her years of daily, heroic renunciation.

In an existential context her biography would be incomplete without a synthesis of her Christian witness and without a consideration of the importance of her ecclesial message.

## *WITNESS*

A description of Blessed Maria's Christian witness involves treating the gamut of the virtues, which she practised to a heroic degree. This has been done in the course of this book. A synthesis of this witness can be limited to noting a few outstanding characteristics which give to her a distinct physiognomy among the ranks of the Blessed.

The first twenty-five years of her life, which were spent with her family except for her two years in school in Riedenburg, witness her correspondence to the grace which was hers of being born of parents aware of their mission as Christians and Catholics. They could be pointed to as examples of Christian family proposed by Vatican II "Married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path to holiness by faithful love, sustaining one another in grace throughout their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed from God, with Christian truths and evangelical virtues. For thus they can offer all men an example of unwearying and generous love, build up the brotherhood of charity and stand as witnesses to, and cooperators in, the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church. By such lives they signify and share in that very love with which Christ loved His Bride and because of which He delivered Himself up on her behalf."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed God gave Blessed Maria an environment of true Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless these twenty-five years had a special characteristic worth underlining-her particular interest and practice of daily reading and meditating on the Gospels. Her study of the Gospels was a remote preparation for the incident which determined her choice of life and directed her religious vocation towards an Order of Sisters whose religious were characterised by an apostolate of charity. Her union with and conformity to Christ, formed in her by continuous meditation on the Gospels, led her to make the choice she did. A daily giving of herself to the poorest of her brothers and sisters could never have been carried out without this deeply formed love of Christ.

For, a significant event determined the life choice of the young Maria Droste zu Vischering. When she answered her own question - what would Jesus have done?-and chose to reach out tenderly to the young woman in the hospital of Darfeld whom her aristocratic mother passed by; when she did that there was sown in her heart a call to the never-sufficiently-appreciated apostolate of the Religious of the Good Shepherd. This apostolate was towards those persons most needful of human and divine mercy.

During the World Conference on Woman, held by the United Nations at Mexico City in 1975, Mother Teresa of Calcutta spoke. She referred to her own Missionaries of Charity whose mission is to the poorest, the very dregs of society, and she concluded that her presence at the International Year of Women was as a "witness for the less-known woman, the marginal woman, and the poorest and most unhappy, such as the prostitute."<sup>7</sup>

From the day of her vocation to the Good Shepherd, an Institute which has as its end charity towards the marginals of society, Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering witnessed clearly to what Jesus has asked as the attitude we should take towards women who are victims of a society which is materialistic, careless, erotic and individualistic. In the Good Shepherd of Oporto her apostolate reached heights of heroism by the daily renunciation of her personality. By nature, education, and

spiritual firmness, she was attuned to feel nothing but repugnance toward every form of sin and unpleasantness. In this work of redemption she spent all her organizational energies, and in doing this used the only means of social communication available at the time to augment the Sister's efforts correspondence by letter and the collaboration of other capable persons.

Through correspondence Maria touched some persons who needed the mission of her community but who did not dare come to the Good Shepherd for help because of their social status. At other times she enlisted the cooperation of Christian women, who were asked by her to go where her religious habit would not permit her or the Sisters to go, or where identification as a religious would have been an impediment towards those needing help, sometimes even medical attention.<sup>8</sup>

In the preceeding pages, mention has been made of Blessed Maria's apostolate toward another category of persons who, especially in her time, were "marginal people," priests who had abandoned their ministry. In reparation for these, she made no exceptions. They, too, were souls needing the Good Shepherd. Towards them she carried on not only an active apostolate but especially did she accept her sufferings in expiation for them.

Physical and moral suffering is a mysterious instrument of God's mercy in the process of salvation. The suffering of martyrdom which was not spared even to the Son of God in our redemption is also asked of the elect of the Mystical Body of Christ. Blessed Maria offers to God's People the witness of a generous acceptance of suffering right up to the final gift of her life for the salvation of souls. Thus did her witness reach heroism; she not only accepted suffering with resignation to God's Will, but she suffered joyously as one being ever more conformed to Christ in unconditional love.

Maria's specific ecclesial task was concerned with the consecration of humanity to the Heart of Christ. Her message was

accepted and put into effect by Pope Leo XIII. While acceptance by the official Church of the message of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque required one hundred and eighty years, at which time the feast of the Sacred Heart was placed on the calendar of the universal Church; the consecration of the human race to the Heart of Jesus took place only a few months after the Pope came to know of the message confided by our Lord to Blessed Maria Droste.

Maria Droste's beatification was held during the Jubilee Year of 1975. That, too, was a coincidence since it marked the closing of the third centenary of the apparitions of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary. A definite plan of God's mercy may lie in the coincidence of these dates. Blessed Maria Droste's message acquires a greater significance after her beatification which occurred ten years after the closing of Vatican II.

This is not the place to explore the theology and foundations in revelation and tradition of the cult of the Sacred Heart.<sup>9</sup> The ecclesial message of Blessed Maria Droste concluded that of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. The message of the mystic of Paray-le-Monial gave renewed emphasis to the effects of redemption. "In His revelation to the saint, our Lord repeatedly alluded to His unlimited love for man, the greater part of whom have responded with ingratitude. In spite of this He did not want to bring the ungrateful to account but wanted instead to rise above their ingratitude with new proofs of His love."<sup>10</sup> This message was fully accepted from the time of Pius IX until the reign of our current Pontiff, Paul VI,<sup>11</sup> and includes reparation and the devotional aspect of specific practices.

Blessed Maria Droste's ecclesial message sets a seal of approval upon the ascetical developments of the cult of the Sacred Heart through a deeper knowledge of the revelations given St. Margaret Mary. Already in her own time, St. Margaret Mary insisted that devotion to the Sacred Heart did not consist only in a practice of prayer which would assure happiness on earth and in heaven, but it spelled out a full and total dedication to the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

Blessed Maria Droste, too, insists upon the nature of this cult. She considers the entire humanity of Jesus as really present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and that a true participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice effects a consecration to the Heart of Jesus.

We may now say that Blessed Maria Droste makes precise the theological nature of consecration.

Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was affirmed by the foundation of the Apostleship of Prayer in 1844, a foundation made through the zeal of Father Ramiere, S.J., professor of theology at the Catholic University of Toulouse. In the years which followed, the Apostleship of Prayer grew and included an act of consecration of families, parishes and other groups to the Sacred Heart. During Vatican I Father Ramiere was active. At the conclusion of that council he prepared a petition which was signed by 525 bishops and presented to Pius IX in April, 1875. In this petition the Pope was asked to consecrate Rome, following the political events of 1870, and the entire world to the Sacred Heart.

Pius IX chose not to do this. He died in 1878, and Father Ramiere in 1884, and that was that.

The question was reopened and concluded by the message given Blessed Maria Droste by the Lord and which she transmitted to Leo XIII in 1899. The ends of the consecration were indicated by Maria in her letter of January 6, 1899 to the Pope and repeated by the Pontiff in his encyclical *ANNUM SACRUM* of May 25 of the same year.

". . . We urge and exhort all who know and love this divine Heart willingly to undertake this act of piety; and it is our earnest desire that all should make it on the same day, that so the aspirations of so many thousands who are performing this act of consecration may be borne to the temple of Heaven on the same day. But shall we allow to slip from our remembrance those innumerable others

upon whom the light of Christian truth has not yet shone? We hold the place of Him who came to save that which was lost and who shed His blood for the salvation of the whole human race. And so, we greatly desire to bring to true life those who sit in the shadow of death As we have already sent messengers of Christ over the earth to instruct them. so now. in pity for their lot, with all our soul we commend them and so far as in us lies we consecrate them to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In this way this act of devotion, which we recommend, will be a blessing to all. For having performed it. those in whose hearts are the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ will feel that faith and love increased. Those who know Christ yet neglect His law and its precepts may still gain from His Sacred Heart the flame of charity. And lastly. for those still more unfortunate. who are struggling in the darkness of superstition, we shall all with one mind implore the assistance of Heaven that Jesus Christ, to whose power they are subject. may also one day render them submissive to its exercise; and that, not only in the life to come, when He will fulfill His will upon all men by saving some and punishing others (St. Thomas). but also, in this mortal life by giving them faith and holiness. May they by these virtues strive to honor God as they ought and to win everlasting happiness in heaven.

Such an act of consecration, since it can establish or draw tighter the bonds which naturally connect public affairs with God, gives to States a hope for better things. In these latter times especially. a policy has been followed which has resulted in a sort of wall being raised between the Church and civil society. In the constitution and administration of States the authority of sacred divine law is utterly disregarded, with the view to the exclusion of religion from having any constant part in public life. This policy almost tends to the removal of the Christian faith from our midst, and, if that were possible, of the

banishment of God Himself from the earth. When men's minds are raised to such a height of insolent pride, what wonder is it that the greater part of the human race should have fallen into such disquiet of mind and be buffeted by waves so rough that no one is suffered to be free from anxiety and peril? When religion is once discarded it follows of necessity that the surest foundations of the public welfare must give way, whilst God, to inflict on His enemies the punishment they so richly deserve, has left them the prey of their own evil desires so that they give themselves up to their passions and finally wear themselves out by excess of liberty.

Hence that abundance of evils which have now for a long time settled upon the world and which pressingly call upon us to seek for help from Him by whose strength alone they can be driven away. Who can he be but Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God? FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN TO MEN WHEREBY WE MUST BE SAVED. (Acts IV,12) We must have recourse to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We have gone astray and we must return to the right path: darkness has overshadowed our minds, and the gloom must be dispelled by the light of truth; death has seized upon us, and we must lay hold of life. It will, at length, be possible that our many wounds be healed and all justice spring forth again with the hope of restored authority; that the splendors of peace be renewed and swords and arms drop from the hand when all men shall acknowledge the empire of Christ and willingly obey His word, and EVERY TONGUE SHALL CONFESS THAT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS IN THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER. (Phil. 2/11)

When the Church, in the days immediately succeeding her institution, was oppressed beneath the yoke of the Caesars, a young emperor saw in the heavens a cross, which became at once the happy omen and cause of the glorious victory that followed. And now, today, another blessed and heavenly token is offered to our sight-the most

Sacred Heart of Jesus with a cross rising from it and shining forth with dazzling splendor amidst flames of love. In that Sacred Heart all our hopes should be placed, and from it the salvation of all men is to be confidently sought."<sup>13</sup>

This same Leo XIII also implemented Blessed Maria's expressed eagerness for further promoting the cult of the Sacred Heart and especially the practice of honoring the Heart of the Lord on the First Friday of each month. This he did by means of a letter from Cardinal Mazella, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, to the bishops of the world, dated July 21, 1899.

Blessed Maria's ecclesial message may well be supported also by the fact that her beatification took place during the Holy Year of 1975, at the conclusion of the third century of the apparitions at Paray-le-Monial, and ten years after Vatican Council II and Pope Paul's Apostolic Letter, "Investigabiles Divitias" of 1965. For, her message has a direct bearing upon ecumenism. The fact that the entire human race was consecrated to the Sacred Heart was a remote preparation for Vatican II, at which time ecumenism became more encouraged universally and supported by the Church of Rome, not only with regard to our separated brethren but also to the non-baptised and pagans as well.

Finally, her beatification revives hope for renewed zeal in spreading the worship of the Heart of Christ among priests, religious and laity in the spirit of sacrificial consecration enunciated by Vatican II.<sup>14</sup> Very often, we blame materialism for the widespread turning away from Christian practices and for a decline in honoring the Heart of Jesus. But also can it not be due to an omission on the part of the Shepherds of the flock?

Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering may well be, in God's plan, His chosen instrument for bringing new animation to a lived devotion to Christ as Love, as Heart.



## Footnotes - CHAPTER V

1. "Lumen Gentium." No. 40-from *Documents of Vatican II*, W. M. Abbott, S. J., gen. editor. New York: Guild Press, 1966.
2. *Ibid.*
3. "Lumen Gentium," *op. cit.*, No. 41.
4. Bl. Ezechial Moreno y Díaz, Bishop of Pasto in Colombia (1848-1906); Bl. Gaspare Bertoni, (1777-1853); Bl. Vincent Grossi, (1845-1917); and Bl. Giovanna Francesca of the Visitation, Anna Michelotti, (1843-1888).
5. "Lumen Gentium," *op. cit.*, No. 41.
6. About the Droste family there are several monographs in existence, especially treating the parents of the Beata. Cf. P. Gerard Oesterle, OSB, *Clemens Graf Droste zu Vischering*, Bruck Regensberg Munster, 1941.
7. Cf, *La Voce*, weekly on religious social work, Year 23, No. 35, Sept. 14, 1975.
8. Apostolic Process of Oporto, p. 110.
9. Cf. Aurelio Dionisi, ". . . e ne uscì sangue ed acqua," Roma, 1974, p. 91.
10. Schwendimann, Federico, *Il Cuore di Gesù Oggi?* Rome, 1974, p. 91.
11. Solano, Jesus, "Centenary of an Exceptional Charism," St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the devotion to the Sacred Heart, in *L'osservatore Romano* of Sept. 5, 1975 (Italian edition).
12. Schwendimann, Federico, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
13. Encyclical letter ANNUM SACRUM, "On the Consecration of Mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus," May 25, 1899. Published in *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII*, N.Y.; Benziger Brothers, 1903, p. 458-460.
14. From the Constitutio) on the Sacred Liturgy, from Documents of Vatican II, *op. cit.*

## Appendix I

### Formula of Act of Consecration composed by Blessed Maria Droste

My most loving Jesus, I consecrate myself anew today and without reserve to Your Divine Heart. To You I consecrate my body with all its senses, my soul with all its faculties. and my whole being. To you I consecrate all my thoughts, words and works; all my sufferings and labors; all my hopes, consolations and joys; and chiefly I consecrate to You my poor heart that I may love but You, and be consumed as a victim in the flames of Your love.

Accept, O Jesus, my most loving Spouse, the desire I have to console Your Divine Heart and to belong to You forever. Take possession of me in such a manner that henceforward I may have no other liberty than that of loving You, no other life than that of suffering and dying for you.

In You I place unbounded confidence, and I hope for pardon of my sins from Your infinite mercy. In Your hands I lay all my cares and principally that of my eternal salvation. I promise to love You and to honor You until the last moment of my life, and to propagate as far as I am able, with the help of Your Divine grace, devotion to Your most Sacred Heart.

Dispose of me O Divine Heart of Jesus, according to Your good pleasure. I desire no other recompense than Your greater glory and Your holy love.

Grant me the grace to find in Your most Sacred Heart my dwelling place; there I desire to pass each day of my life; there I wish to breathe forth my last sigh. Make also my heart Your abode, the place of Your repose; that so we may remain intimately united until one day I may praise, love and possess You for all eternity, and sing forever the infinite mercies of Your most Sacred Heart. Amen.

## Appendix II

### Formula Prescribed by Leo XIII for the Universal Consecration of June 11, 1899

Most sweet Jesus, Redeemer of the human race, look down upon us humbly prostrate before Your altar. We are Yours and Yours we wish to be; but to be more surely united to You, behold each one of us freely consecrates himself today to Your most Sacred Heart. Many indeed have never known You; many too despising Your precepts, have rejected You. Have mercy on them all, most merciful Jesus, and draw them to Your Sacred Heart. Be King, O Lord, not only of the faithful who have never forsaken You, but also of the prodigal children who have abandoned You; grant that they may quickly return to their Father's house, lest they die of wretchedness and hunger. Be King of all those who live in the darkness of error or whom discord keeps aloof from You; call them back to the harbor of truth and unity of the faith, so that there may be but one flock and one shepherd. Finally, be King of all those who are involved in the darkness of idolatry, and refuse not to draw them out of darkness into the light and kingdom of God. Grant, O Lord, Your Church, assurance of freedom and immunity from harm; give peace and order to all nations, and make the earth resound from pole to pole with one cry: Praise to the Divine Heart that wrought our salvation; to it be glory and honor forever. Amen.

(From the Latin text in *La Civiltà Cattolica*,  
year 50, No. 1176, p. 636).

## Appendix III

### Decree Concerning the Heroicity of Virtue

Dioceses of Oporto and Munster: Beatification and canonization of the Servant of God Maria of the Divine Heart (Droste zu Vischering), Religious of the Institute of the Good Shepherd.

*Object:* To establish whether the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and towards her neighbor, and of the cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance, and of the other virtues related to these, have been consistently verified in the case under investigation.

The Redeemer of the human race benevolently deigned to reveal the unsearchable riches of His Heart to His servant Margaret Mary Alacoque, and since then the worship and devotion towards the Sacred Heart have been propagated throughout the world, filling with love the souls of the faithful. Especially has this been enhanced through the efforts of priests who have been filled with zeal and of pious religious burning with love towards God Who is Love. Among the latter, towards the end of the 19th century, must be enscribed the Servant of God Maria Droste zu Vischering, called in religion Maria of the Divine Heart.

If one diligently studies the life of this Servant of God, one cannot help admiring both the splendor of her virtue, which greatly overshadowed in nobility her birth and life, and also the singular graces with which our kind Savior, in hidden and difficult ways, led her to the heights of perfect charity. Burning with an ardent love for daily Communion and the desire to open the entire human race to the infinite riches of the Redeemer, she addressed a letter to the Holy Father, Leo XIII. This led, in the beginning of the 20th century, to his consecrating the entire

human race to the Sacred Heart, a consecration announced in a special encyclical letter.

Maria was born September 8, 1863, in Munster in Westphalia of noble and pious parents: Count Clement Droste zu Vischering and Countess Helen von Galen. Because she was born in danger of death, she was baptised by the very doctor who had delivered her from her mother's womb, and this in spite of the fact that he belonged to the Masonic sect. After three days she received solemn baptism conditionally.

She passed the first years of her life in the family castle of Darfeld where her parents taught her the practices of the Christian life, especially devotion towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At 11 years of age she made her First Holy Communion and shortly afterwards received the Sacrament of Confirmation. When fifteen she felt she was called to the religious life, and at 16 enrolled as a student at the boarding school of the Sacred Heart in Rienenburg, where she remained for two years and where she became even more convinced of her religious vocation. Returning home, she revealed this call to the convent to her parents, who, although happy, on account of her delicate health answered that they would not give permission until she had completed her 21<sup>st</sup> year of age. When she was twenty-three, still unable to enter the convent because of her health, she embraced in her home in Darfeld a life of prayer and service. Finally, on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 1888, at 25 years of age, with the permission of her confessor and of her parents, she entered the Institute of the Good Shepherd, where she was given the name of Maria of the Divine Heart.

After the usual years of novitiate she made her religious profession in the religious house of Munster, where she was appointed directress of the young girls, a charge which was also given to her after her transfer to Portugal.

She remained for a short time in Lisbon but shortly after her arrival in Portugal, in the beginning of 1894, she was appointed

superior of the House of the Good Shepherd at Oporto. This house was in very grave difficulty, but as soon as Sister Maria was appointed superior the number of the young girls cared for by the sisters increased. To them she gave not only the basics of religion but she also tried to inflame with an ardent devotion to the Sacred Heart. A few years after her arrival in Oporto, she contracted the serious illness of myelitis, which impeded her from walking and sometimes also from speaking. In spite of all the treatments, she was obliged to remain in bed, but even from there succeeded in directing the house.

She suffered joyously the intense pains of her illness, and while an invalid was inspired to implore the Holy Father, Leo XIII, to consecrate the human race to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Everything was ready for this solemn consecration when the Servant of God went to Heaven on June 8, 1899, at the age of 36 years, leaving her sisters a lively example of piety and of a spirit of prayer.

After her death she was not forgotten. In fact, the extraordinary fame of her sanctity was well remembered. Because of this the Bishop of Oporto, in whose diocese she had died, opened the processes which are called "ordinary" in Oporto between the years 1921-26. The other investigatory processes followed, especially at Munster where the Servant of God had passed many years. These processes having been transferred to Rome, the investigation was resumed here. The decree on her writings was promulgated July 16, 1941 by Pope Pius XII of happy memory, who signed with his own hand the commission for the introduction of the cause on the 28th of November of the same year. On the following 22nd of April the Sacred Congregation promulgated the decree for the observance of the decrees of Urban VIII. Then were opened successively the apostolic process on her virtues and on her miracles, the juridical validity of which was declared March 26, 1948.

After all this, the Rev. Joseph Hamon of the Congregation of Eudists, who was the legitimate postulator of the cause,

requested the investigation of the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God. The first discussion of this was held February 17, 1953, in the anti-preparatory congregation; the second was held in the preparatory congregation on December 17, 1957; and finally the general congregation was held in the presence of His Holiness Pope Paul VI on January 28, 1964, during which His Eminence Cardinal Benedict Aloisi-Masella, Bishop of Palestrina and Relator of the Cause, proposed discussion on the question: of the consistency of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and towards her neighbor, and of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, and of all the other virtues stemming from these in an heroic degree in the case under discussion.

There were present the Reverend Cardinals, the official prelates, and the theological consultants, and each gave his vote. The Holy Father accepted these votes, but deferred judgment and exhorted everyone to pray in order to obtain light from on high.

Finally he chose this day on which he convoked to his presence the Reverend Cardinal Arcadio Larraona, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites; Benedict Aloisi-Masella, Relator of the Cause; P. Ferdinand Antonelli of the Order of Friars Minor, Promotor General of the Faith; and the undersigned secretary. After the celebration of Holy Mass, he pronounced the consistency of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and her neighbor, of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude and of other virtues stemming from these, of the Servant of God Maria Droste zu Vischering, in a heroic degree and according to the investigation.

The same Holy Father has ordered the publication of the present decree to be encribed in the acts of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Given at Rome, February 13, 1964.

L.S.

(signed)

M. Cardinal Larraona,  
Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

Henry Dante, Archbishop of Carpasien  
Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.



## Appendix IV

### Decree Concerning the Miracles

Oporto and Munster: Beatification and Canonization of the Venerable Servant of God Maria Droste zu Vischering, Religious of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

*Object:* To establish if what has here been discussed is miraculous.

Among the greatest zealous propagators of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of the Redeemer of the human race, we must count the Venerable Servant of God Maria Droste zu Vischering who, born in 1863 from a noble family at Munster in Westphalia, entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and desired there to be called Sister Maria of the Divine Heart. She died the 8th June 1899, in the city of Oporto in Portugal, leaving a name of great sanctity. Her virtues, after all the usual investigation, have been decreed heroic by our Holy Father Pope Paul VI on February 13, 1964.

For the solemn beatification of the Servant of God, the promoters of the cause have proposed for the consideration of this Forum one of the many miraculous cures obtained through the intercession of the Venerable.

The prodigy, the historical truth of which we are treating in this present decree, concerns a young girl, Isabella dos Santos, who in the city of Oporto during the night between the night of the 6th and 7th of December, 1952, was instantaneously and perfectly cured from a very grave peritonitis of a tubercular nature and of terminal meningitis. The cure was immediately recognised by three doctors who had been caring for her, by nurses, and by other witnesses.

The apostolic process concerning the above mentioned cure was opened in the ecclesiastical curia of Oporto on February 23, 1953, and lasted until April 2, 1957. Transmitted to the Sacred Congregation, at that time called of Rites, it was recognised to be valid by a decree of April 10, 1965.

In the seating of November 6, 1974, the medical consultants of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints have diligently discussed the above cure which, having taken place instantaneously and perfectly, was recognized as miraculous. Successively this same cure was discussed first in the special commission of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints on May 20, 1975, and then on July 8 in the plenary congregation of the Cardinals, during which Cardinal Umberto Mozzoni, Relator of the cause, has presented for discussion the following question: if and on what miracle there is proof in the case we are discussing.

After their discussion, the very reverend fathers present answered with affirmative sentiments.

On July 12, 1975, the report was made to the Holy Father by the Reverend Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The Holy Father, confirming the opinion of the Cardinals, has ordered this decree to be prepared. At the same time, accepting the request of the promoters, he has kindly granted a dispensation from the second miracle which is required by law, so that with one only approved miracle it is possible to proceed to the solemn beatification of the Venerable.

Therefore today, convoked around his person, the undersigned pro-prefect; Cardinal Umberto Mozzoni, Relator of the Cause; myself as secretary; and the other persons who are usually called for this, he pronounced the consistency of the aforesaid miracle; namely, of the instant and perfect cure of Isabella dos Santos from very grave peritonitis and terminal meningitis.

His Holiness himself has finally ordered the publication of the present decree and its insertion into the acts of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Vatican City, October 3 of the Holy Year 1975

Corrado Bafile,  
Titular Bishop of Antioch in Pisidia

Giuseppe Cesoria,  
Titular Archbishop of Vescovia.  
Secretary .



*Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd – Angers, France*