

FR. SCOTT JONES SDS

# Blessed Mary of the Apostles

*Zealous for the Mission*

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**Curia Generalizia dei Salvatoriani**

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**“The veneration of Blessed Mother Mary of the Apostles is essentially linked with the veneration of our Founder, Father Jordan, because she was the first who followed the way proposed by Father Jordan to be beatified by the Church.”**

In this way, the 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Salvatorians held in Logroño in 2006 formulated the fifth point of the ordinance on the promotion of the veneration of Father Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan, the Founder of our Salvatorian Family (which includes the Salvatorian fathers, brothers, sisters as well as lay Salvatorians), thus confirming the significance of the person of Blessed Mary of the Apostles to the entire Salvatorian Family. Therefore, it appears only natural that the new volume in the series of booklets under the heading **“Salvatorians Worth Knowing”**, which we have published since year 2005, should include a biography of the German Baroness Therese von Wüllenweber, known today as Blessed Mary of the Apostles.

The above mentioned series was opened with a biography of Servant of God Father Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan, Founder of the Salvatorians, which was followed by a biography of his first collaborator Fr. Bonaventure Lüthen.

As the male branch of the religious congregation founded by Father Jordan, we are very pleased to be able to participate in the celebrations of this one hundredth anniversary of the death of Mother Mary of the Apostles (December 25, 1907) with this modest publication,

which we wish to present to our Salvatorian Sisters as a little gift. We also consider it an important element of fulfilling the requirement of the ordinance given by the 17th General Chapter in Logroño which I quoted above.

Simultaneously, I wish to express my deepest gratitude and my deepest thanks to Fr. Scott Jones, SDS, the author of the present booklet, who assumed the responsibility of writing it and was assisted in that task by the International Historical Commission, of which he is a member.

Let this booklet, which appears in print in seven languages, reach a wide spectrum of readers in various parts of the world, presenting to them the fascinating story of a vocation that bore the fruit of the glory of the altar, owing to a searching attitude, enduring cooperation with God and laborious reading of God's will in humble submission to the spiritual direction.

Rome, June 16, 2007

*Fr. Andrzej Urbański, SDS  
Superior General*

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## Introduction

The nineteenth century was a time of tremendous growth for active religious communities of women. Historically, most women's institutes were monastic and strictly enclosed. Beginning in the seventeenth century, new movements like the Daughters of Charity founded by Vincent De Paul allowed women a share in the public mission of the Church. The wave of revolutions that swept through Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bringing with it the destruction of so many Church institutions, created an urgent need for a work force that could help rebuild the Catholic world. Women were called upon to help meet this need. Furthermore, the discovery of the New World led to exciting new possibilities of spreading the Gospel abroad. Women were drawn into this mission as well. As a result of such great demands and expanding opportunities, the number of communities of women committed to teaching, nursing, social work, and the mission fields multiplied, even as the Church grappled to understand their canonical status and vocation. Such was the world into which Therese von Wüllenweber, the future Blessed Mother Mary of the Apostles, was born.

The purpose of this short biography is to provide the reader with an overview of the life of Mother Mary of the Apostles. Too often, Mother Mary has been viewed as merely receiving an apostolic mission from Father Francis Jordan, the founder of the Salvatorians. Recent Salvatorian scholarship and, especially, the contributions of the international *Studiengruppe „Maria von den Aposteln“* [Study Group “Mary of the Apostles”] (sponsored by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine

Savior), have shown that Mother Mary received at a very early age a charism from the Holy Spirit that was deeply apostolic and mission-oriented. Throughout her life, this charism matured within her. By the time she met Father Jordan on July 4, 1882, Mother Mary's vocation had developed to the point that she and Father Jordan recognized in one another a common vision, a shared gift of the Spirit. Their resulting collaboration led to the founding of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior.

In preparing this work, the author has relied heavily on the research of fellow Salvatorians. To them he directs the reader who desires a more in-depth study of Mother Mary. *Studiengruppe „Maria von den Aposteln“* [Study Group “Mary of the Apostles”] has published several texts that focus on the life, ministry, and spirituality of Mother Mary, including *Neuwerk: Therese von Wüllenweber, 1876-1888* (1994); Sister Ulrike Musick's *Therese von Wüllenweber: Mother Mary of the Apostles, A Short Biography* (1989) and *The Family of Blessed Mary of the Apostles* (1996); Sister Helene Wecker's *Therese von Wüllenweber and the Currents of Her Times* (1993); and Sister Miriam Cerletty's *Letter Dialogue Between Father Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan and Mother Mary of the Apostles, 1882-1907* (1997). This series has also produced an English rendition of Mother Mary's poetry by Sister Miriam Cerletty entitled *Spiritual Journey in Poetry: Poems by Therese, 1850-1893* (1994). Joan Timmerman's *Not Yet My Season: The Life of Theresa von Wüllenweber* (1969) is still a valuable contribution to the study of Mother Mary, although the reader is advised to make use of the more recent works on Mother Mary that contain the myriad research that has been conducted since the publication of Timmerman's book. Insights into Mother Mary's personality, as well as the growth in self-perception of the Salvatorian Sisters Congregation, are well-

documented in “Mother Mary of the Apostles and the Origins of the Second Order of the Society of the Divine Savior,” first presented by Sister An Vandormael at the Passauer Werkwoche, January 2-5, 1989, and later published both in *Forum, SDS* (1989) and in Volume I of the U.S.A. Province’s *Salvatorian Writings: Charism, History, Spirituality* (1993). Finally, Father Pancratius Pfeiffer’s *Father Jordan and His Foundations* (1931) and Timotheus Edwein’s biography of Father Jordan provide a detailed history of the Founder and the growth of the Salvatorians during his lifetime.

On this one hundredth anniversary of the death of Mother Mary of the Apostles, the Society of the Divine Savior wishes to present the Sisters of the Divine Savior with this short tribute to Mother Mary. Through it, may devotion to her continue to spread. We are greatly indebted to Mother Mary and the many Salvatorian Sisters who have ministered with us throughout the years. Mother Mary continues to serve as a model for all who persist in courageously pursuing a vocation even when the obstacles of the era seem insurmountable. As we continue into the future, we celebrate the collaboration that was the dream of Father Jordan and Mother Mary. We know that it is only through this collaboration that we can continue to witness the goodness and kindness of Christ our Savior to others, and to make the love of God known through all ways and means that the love of Christ inspires.

## **The Early Years of Therese von Wüllenweber**

Therese was born on February 19, 1833, at her family home near the city of Mönchengladbach, in western Germany, to Theodore and Elise von Wüllenweber. Her parents named her after her paternal grandmother, Therese

von Dwingelo. Therese's family was of the nobility and the home in which she grew up, Castle Myllendonk, was among her family's property (her mother had inherited part of it, and Therese's parents acquired the rest of it after their marriage). Therese described her father as a "strict Catholic" and a "real man of honor," and her mother as "dedicated to acts of charity and devotion and having rare spiritual gifts" ("Life Sketch," Edwein, DSS XIV, 4.16/21). The household in which Therese grew up was devout and filled with life, for she was the eldest of five daughters. As a child a governess tutored her, but when she was fifteen, her parents sent her to a boarding school in Liege, Belgium. Originally, at the desire of her father, she was to attend a different school with a more secular outlook, but her father experienced a change of heart, and so upon the advice of Bishop van Bommel, he selected the Benedictine school *La Paix Notre-Dame*. At this academy, Therese received a thorough education in mathematics, literature, languages (French, German, and English), the sciences, sewing, art, and music (Musick, *Short Biography*, 6). Therese loved her school and her time in Liege. She deeply respected the Benedictine nuns who ran *La Paix Notre-Dame*, but she knew instinctively that the enclosed life of the Benedictines was not for her. Throughout her life, she maintained her attachment to the nuns of *La Paix Notre-Dame* and she visited the Benedictine abbey whenever she was able (Musick, *Short Biography*, 7).

Therese returned to Myllendonk in 1850 and took up the work of assisting her mother in running the household. In late 1853 and early 1854, she attended one of the many popular missions the Jesuits were preaching throughout Germany. This experience acquainted Therese with Ignatian spirituality, and she developed a passion for both the Jesuits and the foreign missions (Wecker, *Therese von Wüllenweber and the Currents of*

*Her Times*, 118). She was especially influenced by Father Philipp von Mehlem, a Jesuit mission-preacher who strongly promoted the work of missionaries. Following her attendance of a second Jesuit mission in 1857, Therese wrote a poem dedicated to the Jesuits that expressed her great love for their charism: “We too want to belong wholly to God our Savior: to be consecrated as you are. We want to employ our energies for him in combat and in loving labor...” (“The Jesuits,” rendition by Cerletty, *Poems by Therese*, 66). Clearly the missionary-apostolic fervor of the Jesuits resonated in Therese’s heart, but there was no female branch of the Jesuits for Therese to enter.

Also influential for Therese was an 1856 retreat she attended with her mother and sister at a Franciscan convent at Nonnenwerth, an island near Bad Honnef in the Rhine. The theme of the retreat reflected those of the popular missions: human destiny, an examination of one’s life, the problem of evil, and the self-denial required of the one who follows Christ (Musick, *Short Biography*, 14). This retreat was significant enough for her that she wrote a poem about it entitled *Nonnenwerth*:

“...Once, to break with the world and life’s pace,  
I withdrew to that island for a space  
Of several days. I spent all my time there  
Seeking God—God alone, in quiet prayer...  
Often, I felt drawn to heaven then,  
And afterwards, back to earth again.  
I stayed at length with the movement within,  
Pondering...  
Without decision whether to delay or begin...”

(Cerletty, *Poems*, 59)

Therese returned from this retreat more convinced that her calling was to some form of religious life. Following the 1857 Jesuit mission at Schiefbahn, Therese burned with a desire to enter a community that was dedicated to the missions. As the result of this mission, Therese applied to the Religious of the Sacred Heart, a community founded by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat and Father Joseph Varin, SJ, in 1800. While she was uncertain where her vocation lay, she knew that the Religious of the Sacred Heart had an Ignatian spirituality and she hoped that the sisters could provide her with some direction (Musick, *Short Biography*, 15).

## **Maturing of Her Vocation**

Therese began her novitiate at the Blumenthal convent in Holland in August 1857 and took first vows in September 1859. Only weeks after Therese's entrance, her mother died of a stroke. While it would have been easy to leave, especially knowing the deep pain her family was experiencing, Therese decided to remain. In time, Therese learned more about the life and charism of the community she had joined. The Sacred Heart congregation was dedicated to the education of girls and women, especially those from the upper classes. While they operated some schools for the poor, and engaged in missionary work as well, Therese was not assigned to either of these apostolates. Instead, her superiors sent her to teach in Warendorf, Westphalia in 1860. In 1861, she was transferred to their convent in Orleans. Therese found the communal life lived by the Sacred Heart Sisters to be very challenging, since they maintained (at that time) a relatively strict enclosure. Furthermore, Therese discovered that the teaching apostolate conducted among girls from wealthy families was not fulfilling the voca-

tion she had received from God. She struggled for several years, hoping that God's will would become clear through her superiors. She eventually discerned that she would need to transfer to another community, or leave religious life altogether and begin anew. After conferring with her superiors, it was mutually decided that Therese's vocation was not with Sacred Heart, and she left the congregation in 1863. Therese's departure was not in any way acrimonious; she maintained friendships with the Sacred Heart sisters throughout her life. Years later, she told Father Jordan that it was easier for her to be a superior because she had experienced so many positive examples among the Sacred Heart community (Musick, *Short Biography*, 19).

Therese returned home only for a day, and then her father took her to the Visitation monastery at Mülheim. The Order of the Visitation, founded by Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal in the early seventeenth century, had originally been intended to be an active, apostolic community of women. Indeed, Therese was attracted to the Salesian spirituality expressed in the writings of Francis de Sales. However, at the time of the founding of the Visitation Order, Church law regarding nuns still required strict enclosure, and so the community at Mülheim continued this practice. Having already experienced several years of traditional convent life, Therese recognized immediately that the cloistered life of the teaching nuns of Visitation was not for her. After a stay of only a few weeks, Therese returned to Myllendonk to continue her discernment.

At Myllendonk, Therese engaged in the tasks of helping to run the household and caring for her sister Louise, who was sick. After several more years of reflecting on her call, she made a third attempt to enter a religious community, the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and Help for Poor Churches in Brussels, Belgium. This communi-

ty, founded by Anna de Meeus in 1857, was dedicated to Eucharistic devotion and pastoral work among the poor. The Sisters were not enclosed, nor did they wear a religious habit. Therese entered as a novice in March 1869 and spent some of her time teaching the impoverished Germans in Liege (Musick, *Short Biography*, 22-3). While she greatly valued her experience with the sisters and gained important ministerial training, Therese decided not to profess her vows as a member of the congregation and she returned for a third time to Myllendonk. She offered little explanation, except to write many years later: "If they had come to Germany, I might perhaps have entered..." (Musick, *Short Biography*, 23).

Following her return to Myllendonk, two key events occurred that altered the course of Therese's life. First, a new parish priest was assigned to Neuwerk in 1872: Monsignor Ludwig von Essen, a priest who was deeply committed to supporting the missions. He introduced Therese to Bishop Raimondi, the Vicar-Apostolic of Hong Kong. Raimondi and von Essen both encouraged Therese to establish a missionary foundation. On April 25, 1875, Therese made a private vow that her life would be lived entirely for the sake of the missions. A few months later, on August 10, she wrote of this zeal in a poem entitled "Yearning:"

When I hear about the missions  
I experience within me a real urgency-  
A loved and a yearning that  
Are otherwise unknown to me.

My lifetime is drifting away,  
My graying hairs are showing;  
But interiorly there is no diminishment.

One thing, only one, I still desire:  
Would that I could serve or go  
Or do something for the missions-  
Something very special, entirely so!

Who implanted this zeal in me?  
Who gave me this deep urge?  
Is it not from God my Savior...  
Meant to return to and in him converge?

I want to give myself to you wholly and entirely-  
Wholly and entirely for whatever you choose.  
I want to disappear in humility...lose  
Myself: be but a tool for you to use.

When death approaches I shall speak;  
I will say, "Look, it is fulfilled!  
What was always moving through my life  
Has unfolded. See what God has willed!"

Cerletty, *Poems*, 83)

A second major event occurred in November 1875, when Therese rented the old Benedictine Abbey of Neuwerk (which she eventually purchased). She moved into the house in March 1876 and, for the first time, at age 43, Therese lived outside of the structured life of family or religious congregation. Therese hoped to establish at Neuwerk a quasi-religious community with women boarders with whom she would pray and engage in charitable works. These included caring for orphans and teaching domestic skills, singing, and teaching craft-work to factory girls on Sundays (which provided an opportunity to catechize them as well). This foundation at Neuwerk, which she named the Saint Barbara Institute, experienced much turnover in membership, for various

women spent short periods of time testing their vocations there. Many were pensioners who were completely unsuitable due to advanced age and the expectation that they could simply retire at the Institute. Furthermore, the Kulturkampf forbade the establishment of new religious communities, the wearing of habits, and any sort of public ministry, and so, at least externally, Therese's Institute had to be secular in appearance. Therese hoped to affiliate it with a larger community of women outside of Germany (in order to gain canonical status), and so from the time of its establishment, she explored various possibilities. These contacts included the Institute of the Daughters of Divine Love in Switzerland, Father Arnold Janssen's Divine Word community in Holland (which, at the time, had no women's branch), and the Daughters of the Heart of Mary, a women's religious community founded in France in 1791 during the Reign of Terror, and whose members were not required to wear a habit or to observe a common life. None of these attempts were successful, however, and Therese continued to pray for a way to express the call she had received from God.

## **Breakthrough**

Therese was now in her late forties, and still had not found what she was searching for. Options were growing more limited, since she had reached an age where few communities would consider her as a viable candidate. Furthermore, due to the restrictions on public ministry resulting from the Kulturkampf, the Saint Barbara Institute did not have a clear purpose, and Therese knew that simply running the Institute alone was not fulfilling that vocation for which God had created her. All of this changed on April 12, 1882, as she was reading an

advertisement for *Der Missionär*, a publication of the Apostolic Teaching Society. The purpose of the Society was to spread and defend the Catholic Faith through all ways and means, at home and in the missions. The emphasis on the missions appealed to Therese and she wrote to Father Bernard Lüthen (who was responsible for the German-speaking regions of the Society) and asked to be admitted. On May 20, Lüthen wrote back to her with a copy of *Der Missionär*, which included a description of the Apostolic Teaching Society. The Society was comprised of three levels. The first degree included those who, like the Apostles, left everything behind for the service of the Gospel. They embraced celibate chastity and worked exclusively for the Society. Those of the second degree were university scholars who remained at their posts while furthering the purpose of the Society. Finally, members of the third degree participated in the apostolate according to their state in life. Married persons, shopkeepers, manual labourers, secular clergy...all were invited to consider membership in the third degree. These three degrees would not be separate communities, but rather, all members would belong to the same Society. The only distinction would be the intensity of their involvement.

Lüthen's letter included an enrollment card for the third degree. A week later, Therese wrote back to Lüthen with a generous offer:

Reverend, is there any hope that through your congregation my well-situated convent might become a mission-house for missionaries at first, with the condition that I would keep the direction of the house in a sisterly spirit ...With the hope, if it is God's will, to found later a congregation of sisters of the Apostolic Teaching Society? ... I would donate the monastery completely for this purpose (Edwein, DSS XIV, 4.21).

When Lüthen informed Jordan of Therese's offer, Jordan saw the hand of Divine Providence at work. He had founded the Apostolic Teaching Society in Rome six months earlier on December 8, 1881, with himself, Lüthen, and a third priest, Frederick von Leonhardi as the first members (von Leonhardi left the Society in January 1883). Jordan was deeply concerned about the evils of the age, especially the encroaching secularism that had led to the anti-clerical Kulturkampf in his German homeland. He believed that only through a mass movement of persons from all walks of life, united together in a love for the Divine Savior, could the situation be reversed. Therese's offer of her Saint Barbara Institute allowed for the possibility of anchoring the Society in Prussia, and so he personally travelled to Neuwerk in early July 1882 to meet with her.

Therese was struck by Jordan's personality: "A greater joy I could never have experienced! [Jordan] gave me the impression of a humble, zealous, true apostle!... He appeared to me to be like a saint sent by God" (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 4). Jordan stayed for three days and it was clear that the two had discovered in one another kindred spirits who shared a common charism from the Spirit. Recognizing Jordan's movement as that to which God had called her, Therese submitted herself to Jordan's direction. Before he left, he gave her a new daily schedule to follow that reflects both the spirituality of the times and the standard devotional practices of most religious institutes. It included Morning Prayers, a half hour of meditation, Mass, fifteen minutes of spiritual reading, fifteen minutes of Eucharistic Adoration, one Chapter of the *Imitation of Christ*, the Little Office of the Mother of God, the Prayers of the Society, the Rosary, and a daily *examen*. She was also to confess and receive Communion weekly, to meditate on the Passion each Thursday evening, and to hear one Mass a month or say

a Rosary for the Society (Pfeiffer, *Father Jordan*, 186-7). Shortly after Jordan's departure, Therese wrote a song about the Society entitled "Lyric," which is to be sung to the melody of "O Sanctissima:"

O holy, venerable,  
Unique Society!  
Apostolic, soul-zealous,  
Greathearted Society!

Grow steadily, increase,  
Spread everywhere!  
Embrace and renew the universe!

Draw to yourself pastors of souls,  
Draw teachers, educators and  
Dedicated women-  
Oh, lead and guide them all!

Rechristianize the homeland;  
Evangelize non-believers;  
Protect parentless children-  
Oh, teach and instruct them all!

Motivate fathers to steadfastness,  
Mothers to holy child-rearing,  
Country innkeepers to trustworthiness-  
To holiness, call them all!

Impart true wisdom to the learned;  
Give pure form to the arts;  
Consecrate and transform the workworld.  
Oh, do it...do it!

Enlighten your own leaders,  
Ignite them heart and soul

So that truly they seek nothing  
But Jesus alone!

O holy, venerable,  
Unique Society!  
Apostolic, soul-zealous,  
Greathearted Society!

(Cerletty, *Poems*, 95)

On September 5, 1882, Therese took her temporary private vows in the first degree of the Apostolic Teaching Society at the hands of Father von Leonhardi:

Herewith I promise, with full knowledge of what I am doing, to obey the rev. J. B. Jordan, priest and Founder of the Apostolic Teaching Society, in everything that is permissible and to live in the spirit of poverty and of holy chastity in the way that I have until now. By this promise I intend for the present to bind myself to the Reverend J. B. Jordan for one year beginning today (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 5).

It should be noted that this was an extraordinary occurrence that a woman would be admitted to the same grade of the Society as the male members, with no distinction on the basis of sex. It demonstrates Jordan's original intent that all would be one in the community. The following day, in the presence of a notary, Therese donated to the Apostolic Teaching Society the Saint Barbara Institute. She was now fully committed to the Apostolic Teaching Society, and there was no turning back.

The Society itself, however, was undergoing major changes during this period. In the fall of 1882, its name was changed from the Apostolic Teaching Society to

the Catholic Teaching Society (to circumvent criticism that the Society was usurping the teaching authority of the Holy See, which was the authentic successor of the apostles). For both Jordan and Therese, it was a sad change. Then, the following spring, on March 11 (Palm Sunday), Jordan made religious vows into the hands of his confessor, taking the name “Francis Mary of the Cross.” Lüthen followed a week later, receiving the name “Bonaventure.” Thus, their canonical status was now that of members of a religious community, complete with a rule and habit (which consisted of a cassock that was originally grey, but later black, and a cincture with four knots signifying the evangelical counsels and the apostolate).

Jordan’s concept of how women would be involved in the Society also shifted at this time. Since canonical regulations forbade men and women to belong to the same religious institute, it became necessary to found a canonically separate congregation for the sisters of the Catholic Teaching Society. Jordan still believed that both motherhouses needed to be in Rome, sharing a common vision and charism, and so it was there that on Easter Sunday 1883 he invested Amalia Streitl and two other women with the habit. Streitl was a former Franciscan sister who later transferred to the Discalced Carmelites. While at Carmel, she felt that God was calling her to combine Carmelite contemplation with Franciscan poverty. She left Carmel and joined forces with Jordan, who saw in her the potential of leading the new sisters’ foundation in Rome. His plan was that the small community of sisters in Neuwerk, headed by Therese, would eventually unite with the sisters in Rome. At this point, there were two other sisters with Therese: Ursula Rabis and Barbara Mayr (who left the group in 1884). Both had previously been part of an even earlier failed

foundation in Johannesbrunn. Jordan wrote to Therese on Good Friday of that year:

I think of you often and I have not forgotten Neuwerk. It is possible that you and the other sisters may need to come to Rome for some time this fall...If at all possible, we must have our motherhouses in Rome, the center of Christendom. From here the individual sisters, too, will be sent out to the missions (March 23, 1883; Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 8).

Therese was disappointed to learn that the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Catholic Teaching Society would be in Rome, for she had hoped that Neuwerk would be its center. Still, she accepted the decision of Jordan as her superior with complete trust. He visited Neuwerk the following month and on May 31, 1883, Therese made her private final vows as a member of the Catholic Teaching Society in the presence of Father Jordan. She received the name “Mary Therese of the Apostles.” Later she wrote in her diary: “Everything for the good God and for my soul took place...At last, at last—forever—forever...” (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 9).

In Rome, the small community led by Streitel (whose religious name was now “Frances”) was growing, but it slowly became apparent that her view of religious life differed greatly from Jordan’s. In Sister Frances’ opinion, the community should practice strict poverty and total abstinence from meat, eggs, and other dairy products. Jordan was concerned that the religious observances proposed by Sister Frances were more appropriate for the contemplative life than for a community dedicated to apostolic work. He urged moderation. Furthermore, he knew that if there was to be one congregation of sisters, then it was important for the Rome and Neuwerk communities to become better acquainted. He called Sis-

ter Mary Therese to Rome for a period of some months, along with Sister Ursula Rabis, and sent sisters from the Roman community to Neuwerk (a request Sister Mary Therese had made in order to maintain Neuwerk in her absence). They arrived in Rome in July 1884, but from the beginning, it was clear to Sister Mary Therese that this was not the place for her. She believed that the Roman community's form of life did not reflect the vision of Jordan or her own calling, and so, after spending only three weeks there, she and Sister Ursula returned to Neuwerk. Before leaving Rome, she promised herself that she would rather die than leave the Society, and that she would remain faithful to Jordan and to the Rule of the Society. Jordan wrote to her shortly after her departure:

The Lord will have guided you safely back to Neuwerk. I was quite concerned and troubled and can only adore the holy will of God. Yes, let us pray that we may die to ourselves completely and live only for Christ. I will pray to the Lord and He will set everything right if we persevere in patience and do His holy will (August 21, 1884, reprinted in Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 16).

Back in Neuwerk, the situation was equally grave, for the sisters from Rome observed a completely separate communal life from the Neuwerk community, with separate meals and prayers. Jordan asked Sister Frances to go to Neuwerk herself to correct the problem. Sister Frances and Sister Scholastica Demmer arrived in Neuwerk in September, but things did not improve, and so all members of the Roman community returned to Rome at the end of the month (Edwein, DSS XIV, 5.26).

In Rome the situation deteriorated as Jordan and Streitl's visions continued to diverge. Streitl's experience in her two previous religious communities had

clarified for her the type of religious life she felt called to live. Jordan's experiences were those of a diocesan priest who had come to religious life at a relatively late age, and so his approach was far different. Furthermore, Streitl's canonical status was soon complicated by the revelation that she had never been formally dispensed from her Franciscan vows, and when Jordan sought clarification, he was told by the Vicar of Rome that she would have to complete a new novitiate and could not serve as superior during the interim. Misunderstandings regarding this led to intervention by Monsignor Jacquemin, a canon lawyer who also served as the sisters' confessor. Sister Scholastica and Jacquemin asked the Cardinal Vicar of Rome for help in the matter, and the outcome was a complete separation of the Roman community of sisters from the Catholic Teaching Society. They were given a new name: "The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother." Jordan was in Germany as these events unfolded, and by the time he returned to Rome, the matter had been decided. He was told by the Cardinal Vicar to have no further contact with the sisters. On October 13, 1885, Jordan officially withdrew from any involvement with the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.

Jordan was devastated by this turn of affairs. Lüthen wrote to Sister Mary Therese and informed her of the outcome:

The truth is this: the Cardinal Vicar has withdrawn the sisters from the direction of our Venerable Father. Imagine, what this blow has been for him. The good God certainly puts his own to the test.... Since you and S. Ursula were not connected to the sisters in Rome, you are not withdrawn from our Venerable Father's direction. But it would be imprudent for you to come forward already now. It could be misconstrued. So have patience, dear Sisters.

You are living under vows and have that merit (November 8, 1885, reprinted in Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 26).

Because of the delicacy of the situation, it would be three years before Jordan could call Sister Mary Therese to Rome to begin the new congregation. During the interim, Sister Mary Therese and Sister Ursula remained in Neuwerk, living as members of the Catholic Teaching Society without the habit or formal recognition as a religious institute. Her longing to join Jordan in Rome is evident in her correspondence with him: “When, Reverend Father, will God’s call really reach us?...With all the more courage will I now surrender myself to the cross and to suffering. Fifty-three years and nothing accomplished!...How long have I already desired that Eternal Rome!” (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 35).

The long period of waiting eventually came to an end. In February 1888, Jordan asked Sister Mary Therese to have the Saint Barbara Institute appraised so that it could be legally transferred to Father Koch, the parish priest at Neuwerk. (For several months, Koch had been advocating to change the Institute into a hospital that would be staffed by the Franciscan Sisters from Heydthuisen.) While originally Sister Mary Therese had hoped to remain at the Institute until Jordan called her to Rome, by May 1888, it was clear that if the Franciscan Sisters moved into the Saint Barbara Institute, Sister Mary Therese and Sister Ursula would have to move out. This was unsettling for Sister Mary Therese given the uncertainty of what the next step should be, for as yet, the sisters had not been called to Rome. Events took a dramatic turn in July, however, when Jordan wrote to her and informed her of his plans to found the new congregation in Rome in the fall. Therese wrote in her diary in July 1888: “I follow the call to Rome with holy zeal—leaving all!” (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 47).

By November, all the arrangements had been made. Due to the existing policy in the Diocese of Rome that no new sisters' communities could be established within its borders, Jordan, in consultation with the Cardinal Vicar of Rome and Bishop del Frate of Tivoli, located a house in Tivoli that would be the first convent of the new foundation. On November 21, Sisters Mary Therese and Ursula left Neuwerk and traveled to Rome. After three days of visiting pilgrimage sites, Jordan took them to their new home in Tivoli on November 27. That night, they were joined by four new candidates for the community. Sister Mary Therese recalled in her diary much later, in 1900: "The Reverend Father presented to me the Holy Rule, which I received on my knees. And he said, 'If you follow this, you will become holy'" (Musick, *Short Biography*, 49). The Rule which Jordan gave them was the same as that for the men's branch, with a few adaptations appropriate for a women's congregation.

The next week, Jordan led the sisters in an eight-day retreat in preparation for the reception of the habit. Sister Mary Therese kept notes during this retreat:

Humble yourself, obey, submit yourself to atone for the spirit of uproar in Church and State. We must radiate like the sun...If I was not to be here, God would not have inspired the Founder to do so...Italy means all for me. The rest is only minor importance. The greatest grace and the greatest happiness is to suffer (Edwein, DSS XV, 1.28/38).

On December 8, 1888, Mary Therese received the habit and "Therese" was dropped from her name; she was now "Mary of the Apostles." Sister Scholastica and Sister Clara also received the habit, and a few days later, the remaining two received it as well. (After a short period, Ursula Rabis left the community and returned to Germany due to health reasons.) All five sisters, includ-

ing Sister Mary of the Apostles, were technically novices, but Jordan obtained a dispensation to allow Sister Mary to serve a shortened novitiate. On March 25, 1889, she publicly renewed her final vows and Jordan appointed her as superior and novice mistress. She was known for the rest of her life as Mother Mary of the Apostles, reflecting her status as superior of the community.

In Tivoli, the sisters of the new congregation experienced much hardship. Poverty and illness were always a threat. No sooner had the foundation begun than Sister Scholastica was afflicted with smallpox and much of the house was quarantined. The food was poor, and the house was often cold. Neighbors sometimes contributed to the sisters' needs. Yet the sisters themselves shared their resources, and not long after their foundation, as language permitted, they began to teach catechism to the poor children of the area. Mother Mary deeply respected Jordan's judgement and did not engage in any new work without consulting him. In March 1889 she wrote in her diary: "I must be thankful that my life is, in one sense, completed—in order to fully live a new life until death—to give myself totally to the Society—come what may--...Do everything according to the spirit of the Founder..." (Musick, *Short Biography*, 51).

The sisters' community began to grow as women came from Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, and as it grew, the preparation for various apostolates intensified. An 1890 report to Jordan outlined the sisters' activities, including domestic work, the study of languages, tutoring young students, and serving as catechists (Timmerman, 127). In September 1889, Jordan announced that a new foundation would be begun in Assam, India, and he asked that sisters also serve as missionaries. After a year of preparation, which included the study of English and nursing, the first three sisters of the Catholic Teaching Society accompanied the small group of two

priests and two brothers to India in December 1890. Three years later, in August 1893, five sisters went to the new mission in Ecuador (revolution later forced them out), and in May 1895, the first three sisters were sent to the United States. The congregation, whose name had been changed in 1893 to the Second Order of the Society of the Divine Savior, was truly becoming the missionary community for which Mother Mary had longed throughout her life.

As the community grew, Mother Mary continued to hope that the motherhouse and novitiate could be transferred to Rome. Initially, the house in Tivoli was not large enough for the growing community; disease spread quickly in such small quarters, and several sisters died. Later, however, forty-two sisters slept in eighteen bedrooms. By 1892, there were fifty sisters in Tivoli. In May 1893 she personally visited the Cardinal Vicar in Rome and asked if it would be possible for the transfer to occur. He said that it could not happen until at least the following year. With the outbreak of typhus in June 1894, Jordan called Mother Mary and a companion sister to Rome, and twenty more sisters soon followed (they moved into a rented house on the Via Lungara). The pain Mother Mary experienced at the deaths of several of her sisters was compounded by the news that her own father had died. But beyond it all she saw the hand of God at work, for the sisters now had a presence in Rome and soon began teaching catechism at the church of Santo Spirito. Mother Mary later wrote: "Yes, such are the ways of God, through suffering and affliction He drives us to Rome, into the arms of the Father of Christianity" (Musick, 61). Later that year, on October 11, 1894, the sisters in Rome began to receive training at their re-established Teacher Training Institute (it was originally located in Tivoli). They also began assisting at an overnight shelter for homeless men. Others trained

as nurses. The apostolate of the sisters was rapidly diversifying.

While Mother Mary and many of the sisters had moved to Rome, the motherhouse and novitiate remained in Tivoli. This proved to be a very frustrating situation. Mother Mary found herself divided, and sometimes lack of communication between Tivoli and Rome led to misunderstandings and conflict. Furthermore, there were tensions between Mother Mary and the string of superiors in Tivoli, some of whom even went so far as to agitate against both her and Father Jordan. Adding to the difficulty was the fact that even as she endured criticism from the more difficult sisters, she also received corrections from Jordan and Lüthen. But through it all she remained steadfast in her loyalty to Jordan and her dedication to the responsibilities entrusted to her. One sister reported in her testimony after Mother Mary's death: "She was quite often accused; then came reprimands from her higher superiors. But she was not afraid to correct the sisters; she could also be gentle with those sisters who could not bear much" (Musick, *Short Biography*, 71). While the sisters in Tivoli were able to move to a new house in 1896, and again in 1899, and newly-appointed superiors helped to alleviate the tensions between the two groups, Mother Mary's goal remained to bring the motherhouse and novitiate to Rome. With the help of Father Pancratius Pfeiffer, she purchased a convent in the summer of 1903 in the Salita San Onofrio, with the plan that it would become the motherhouse of the community. It was not until November 1904, however, that the Sacred Congregation gave permission that the house in Salita San Onofrio be designated as the motherhouse and novitiate of the congregation.

The activities of Mother Mary during this period reveal the true apostolic spirit of the woman who had

begun her religious life many years earlier within the close confines of the convent of the Sacred Heart. Despite her age, Mother Mary traveled frequently to the foundations, often choosing to travel alone. These journeys took her throughout Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Belgium, and Austria. She also moved freely through the streets of Rome conducting business. On one occasion, in January 1899, she was crossing a bridge over the Tiber when a horse-drawn wagon came at her, going at a fast pace. She jumped out of the way and broke her left arm. While traveling by water, she became very seasick. Both Jordan and Lüthen wrote concerned letters to her on the same day (October 2, 1899). Jordan admonished her to be more careful: “I hear that you are giving too little attention to your health. I expressly warn you to care for it in a prudent manner. Rather spend a little more than suffer harm to it” (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 103). Lüthen likewise encouraged her to take care of herself. He advised her not to travel by water and told her that she needed to take time for a vacation, to “do everything so that your health is not harmed further” (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 102). Yet still she plunged ahead, visiting the foundations and managing the affairs of the congregation.

The sisters’ branch of the Society of the Divine Savior continued to grow. In her annual report to Jordan in January 1900, Mother Mary wrote that the Second Order now numbered 120 members (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 105). As the Society matured, changes were inevitable, especially given the ever-increasing legislation governing religious communities in the Church. In 1902, the approved statutes of the Society were returned to Jordan from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars (which oversaw religious life in the Church), and they included new canonical regulations. As a result, the sisters’ community could no longer be called

the “Second Order;” henceforth, it would be known as the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior. That same year, the priests and brothers held their first general chapter and brought their relationship with the sisters’ congregation into compliance with the new canonical norms that prohibited new communities of men from directing their sisters’ branches. Mother Mary was now fully responsible for the finances, the admission of candidates, and the reception of vows. Furthermore, no Salvatorian priest could serve as a superior for them. But while their canonical connection had been weakened, Mother Mary continued to turn to Jordan, Lüthen and Pfeiffer for advice throughout the remainder of her life.

New communities typically experience many “growing pains,” and the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior was no exception. In May 1904, Jordan presented Mother Mary with the new Rule that had been approved by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars. It required Mother Mary to have four general councillors. Jordan encouraged Mother Mary the following February to comply with this directive as soon as possible. In 1905, Pope Pius X required all religious communities in Rome to undergo an apostolic visitation, and so in July, a ten-day visitation was conducted by Father Thomas Esser, OP, of the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars. Esser was a critic of Jordan who believed that the scope of the sisters’ apostolate was too broad and that their apostolate should be restricted to the teaching of girls. Furthermore, he requested of the Cardinal Vicar that a general chapter of the Sisters of the Divine Savior be convened to deal with the whole issue of proper administration of the congregation. Esser received approval from the Cardinal Vicar to carry out these “reforms,” including presiding over the chapter himself. Jordan, Mother Mary, and both communities

of men and women were opposed to the narrowing of Jordan's vision. Father Pancratius Pfeiffer, the General Procurator of the Society, intervened, first with Esser, and then with the Cardinal Vicar, arguing that the purpose of a visitor was not to re-define the founding apostolate of a congregation. The Cardinal Vicar agreed and he returned the right of defining the apostolate to the Founder, who made only one alteration (permission of the Holy See had to be given for the sisters to engage in nursing in public hospitals).

The general chapter itself that had been mandated by the visitation began in December. At its opening, Esser told the assembled delegates that Mother Mary must resign her position in order to comply with Church requirements and that her re-election was impossible. Mother Mary promptly resigned her office, thanking the sisters for their support. Despite the comments of Esser, when the first vote was taken, Mother Mary had eight votes and was in the lead. The runner-up, Sister Ambrosia, demanded to know if the sisters were forbidden to re-elect Mother Mary. Esser replied that if Mother Mary were elected, formal approbation of the congregation would be more difficult and the election itself might not be confirmed. Sister Ambrosia then encouraged the sisters to re-elect Mother Mary, at least as a show of support, and to let the Cardinal Vicar decide whether or not to confirm the vote. A second vote resulted in a unanimous re-election of Mother Mary (except for her own vote, which she cast in favour of Sister Bonaventura). The sisters also elected a full slate of councillors, a treasurer, and a secretary. The Cardinal Vicar later confirmed the election, and so Mother Mary continued to serve as general superior (Edwein, DSS XVI, 2.48-2.50).

## The Death of Mother Mary

After her re-election, Mother Mary's health continued to deteriorate. Her eyesight was failing her, and she had frequent asthma attacks. She relied more heavily on her councillors and the sister-superiors. On May 1, 1906, after suffering from two serious asthma attacks in February and April, she wrote: "Everything as the Divine Savior wills it! No one lives longer than God wills. After these two occurrences, it could stop again completely" (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 140). She became seriously ill at the end of the year and received the Anointing of the Sick. Throughout 1907, she continued in her duties, although in November, she was unable to personally receive the vows of the newly-professed, even though she attended the services. That December, her health took a turn for the worse. In addition to her asthma attacks, she was stricken with meningitis and a throat infection. Father Pancratius Pfeiffer made frequent visits during this time, and obtained for Mother Mary the Apostolic Blessing of Pope Pius X. She was bed-ridden and it was difficult for her to speak or swallow. It was clear that the end was near. On Christmas Eve, she slept most of the day, but was awake in the evening. Most of the sisters had left her sickroom in order to attend Midnight Mass, and only a few remained with her. It was during the solemn celebration of the Christmas liturgy that Mother Mary entered eternity. Sister Bonaventura was present when she died and later described Mother Mary's final moments: "Together, we prayed some ejaculations aloud for her. I called: Reverend Mother, pray also for us sisters! There was still a glance, a breath, and her noble heart had beaten its last; our noble mother had left us..." (Cerletty, *Letter Dialogue*, 153).

The next morning, Father Jordan, Father Lüthen, and Father Pancratius came and paid their respects. For

Jordan, it was a painful loss. Mother Mary had been a faithful member of the community, and its first permanent female member. In each other, they had recognized a common charism. Now the sisters' congregation bore the great responsibility of preserving that charism without the force of her physical presence. On December 26, the community celebrated the Office of the Dead in the chapel of the sisters' motherhouse. During a heavy rainfall, her body was taken to the German cemetery of Campo Santo, near Saint Peter's. Because of the heavy rain, the burial could not occur until the following day. On December 27, 1907, Jordan, Lüthen, and many other members of the Salvatorian community of men and women were present as the remains of Mother Mary of the Apostles were laid to rest.

## Her Legacy

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior continued to grow and flourish after the death of Mother Mary. First papal approbation of the Congregation came in 1911 with the *Decretum Laudis*, followed by definitive approbation in 1926. Furthermore, as time passed, many outside the community recognized Mother Mary's holiness and devotion to her increased. In 1943, the cause for her beatification was initiated, and in 1952, her body was exhumed and re-interred at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Divine Savior. Pope Paul VI beatified Mother Mary of the Apostles on October 13, 1968. In his beatification address, the Pope confirmed the mission that had been entrusted to Father Jordan and Mother Mary:

Her many varied foundations proved this intuition right and, as she looked ahead, she perceived the signs of what

the Church has since become conscious of, and which the Council has expressly declared: “That the Christian vocation is, by its nature, a vocation to the apostolate” (Apost. Actuos, n. 2) and that, moreover, there “are many ministries within the Church, but only one mission” (ib.). ...she undertook a truly missionary apostolate in the full sense of the words: that is, announcing the Gospel and founding the Church in lands where it had never been established, and at a time when there were no women missionaries, or when they were just beginning to appear as religious societies (Salvator Mundi Informationes, No. 60, October 13, 1968).

Mother Mary’s great love for the missions, both at home and abroad, and her apostolic spirit, continue to inspire Salvatorian women and men throughout the world. She was a true model of apostolic zeal and a brilliant example of how Christ continues to raise up followers to meet the needs of each new era.

## Quotes of Mother Mary of the Apostles

Taken from Musick, *Short Biography* (1989)

Yes, heart, my heart, I have portrayed  
You faithfully. But how you masquerade!  
How long? How long will you be tossed  
About? Once glad, then sad, or feeling lost?  
Yet, however restless now you may be,  
You will once rest in God eternally.  
("The Heart," 1853)

If it is possible, I will deepen my indissoluble commitment to it [the Society]. I would rather die than leave the Society and also rather suffer, go through every imaginable difficulty, than to leave it—to leave the Founder!! I will never distance myself in the least from him, from his spirit, from his obedience, not even the distance of an atom...(Notebook, 11 August 1884, pp. 2-7).

I am longing for the religious habit now...to be bound forever. How I will thank God in the hour of my death for having done this, for having obeyed, in order to give myself totally to the Society and to forget everything else (Notebook, December 3, 1888).

I hope in all humility that my good sisters will pray much for me, and that they will continue to strive earnestly for their own sanctification, always intent on doing real good to their neighbour and adhering to the spirit of the Founder of the Society of the Divine Savior (*Spiritual Testament to Her Sisters*, 1903).

Everything as the Divine Savior wills it! (May 1, 1906).

## **Prayer to Blessed Mary of the Apostles**

Blessed Mary of the Apostles,  
together with Father Francis of the Cross Jordan,  
you embraced the mission  
to make the love of the Divine Savior known  
through all ways and means that Christ inspires.

Through your intercession,  
may those who follow the Salvatorian charism  
continue to witness the goodness and kindness of Christ  
our Savior,  
so that all may come to know the One True God,  
and Jesus Christ,  
Whom He has sent.  
Amen.

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