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A Dream Come True

Redemptorists and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters

by

Charles Hergenroeder, CSSR

On any given day in 2009, in fact, for the past five years, you could encounter Sister Rita Schneider, IHM (Mother House in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), on the streets of Newark, New Jersey – walking into a lawyer’s office to consult about the case of a Brazilian immigrant who may be in trouble with the U.S. Immigration Service, or accompanying an immigrant to the local Emergency Room, or in her office, on the phone, trying to arrange emergency medical care or housing for a needy immigrant.

Sister Rita ministers with one other Religious Sister, with the Redemptorist community of St. James, in Newark, and with a group of dedicated lay people to a Brazilian congregation of several thousand

Brazilian immigrants in the Newark metropolitan region.

To put Sister Rita’s work in perspective, I would like to bring us to Vienna in 1848. It was then that Barbara Maix, foundress of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was packing her bags and preparing her small band of twenty-five Sisters for their voyage to North America, to work with the Redemptorist John Neumann, in the schools he was promoting at that time in the United States.

And, to understand better how Barbara and her companions had arrived at this decision, together with Father John Pockl, her Redemptorist spiritual director, I would like to go back a little further in

time. First of all, I would like to explain a little of the religious climate at that time in Austria. Then, I will tell the story of Barbara and the Redemptorists in Vienna. Finally, I would like to bring us back to the present, when the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are preparing for the official Beatification of their saintly foundress.



Sister Barbara Maix

The decade of the 1840s in Vienna was very different from our own. At that time, the Catholic Church was trying to survive and nurture its spiritual life under a pervasive State domination which today we call “Josephism.” It was the time of the “Enlightenment,” a philosophical and cultural movement which decreed that every faith – especially the Christian faith – was obsolete. Humanity had to be “enlightened.”

And connected to this philosophical and cultural movement was the practice where government heads of State were trying to emancipate the State from any dependence

on the Church. Enter Emperor Joseph II. From 1765 to 1795, Catholic Austria was governed by Emperor Joseph II who considered himself a man of faith but was infected by the spirit of the Enlightenment. He may not have been interested in destroying the Church, but he did want to remake the Church in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Very often, he let himself be guided by his anti-clerical advisors, who wanted to neutralize the influence of the pope and the bishops. In many cases, priests became nothing more than civil servants. Everything was regulated by the State: the number of candles that could be used on the altar; the content of every sermon that was given in the church; the training of the priestly candidates.

In the 1840s in Vienna, Barbara Maix, John Pockl, and the Redemptorists were living in this kind of cultural and religious milieu.

Before this, in 1820, the Church, “Maria-am-Gestade” (“Mary on the riverbank” or “Mary at the steps”) was entrusted to the Redemptorists, at the request of Clement Hofbauer. The site itself had been a place of veneration to Mary since the year 884. Over the years, several churches had been constructed on the site in honor of Mary, as protector of the fishermen in that place. And, in 1836, the fame of the extraordinary preaching of the Redemptorist missionaries attracted Barbara to the church of Maria-am-Gestade.

In 1840 Barbara chose Father Pockl, one of the Redemptorists staffing Maria-am-Gestade, as her spiritual director and confessor. This was a practice very common in the Church at that time. Someone who wanted to grow in the spiritual life would regularly talk with and request spiritual direction from someone more experienced in the spiritual life to discern together the

path which the Holy Spirit was indicating for an individual. Barbara herself was attending a school for young women to learn different skills such as sewing, knitting, house-keeping, and so forth. During this time, she shared with her companions her childhood-felt desire to dedicate herself to the education and assistance of unemployed young girls and women through a Congregation under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1843, Barbara graduated and was ready, together with some companions, to found just such a Congregation to provide homes and a good education to the many young, unemployed women of that time in Vienna.

Both Barbara and Father Pockl were very aware of the difficulties which they faced. Barbara wished to begin a Religious Congregation in an atmosphere where it would be very difficult to obtain the official approval of the local Church, much less of the government authorities. From 1843 on, she and Father Pockl struggled to achieve this approval. Unfortunately, the Archbishop of Vienna at this time, Vincent Milde, had to tread carefully, under intense State scrutiny. As a result, he did not complain publicly about the constant State meddling in Church business. In fact, he cared very little for the Jesuits and the Redemptorists, who were too “non-conformist” for him.

So, the Superior of the Redemptorists in Vienna, Father Joseph Passerat, was also fighting for his own survival and that of the Redemptorists. They were in constant fear of being suppressed by the government, by overstepping their bounds and not behaving as the government wanted them to behave. Father Passerat, at this time, was worried about all the good work which the Redemptorists were doing, not only in Vienna, but also throughout Austria. At the same time, he was responsible

for the direction of the “Redemptorist Sisters,” a group of Religious (not to be confused with present day “Redemptoristines”) who also ministered to young servant girls and unemployed young women at that time.

Unfortunately, many documents relating to the Redemptorists were lost in 1848, when the government expelled them from Vienna and all of Austria. Because of this, we have many unanswered questions about the relationship between John Pockl and Joseph Passerat; and also between the Sisters directed by Joseph Passerat and Barbara’s Congregation. We do know, however, that there was work to be done at that time in ministering to young servant girls; and surely there was plenty of work for both groups.

But starting on May 8th, 1843, Father Passerat forbade Father Pockl to preach in the church, and ordered him to discontinue any relationship with Barbara’s community. On October 12th of that year, Father Passerat ordered Father Pockl to move to Innsbruck, to apply himself to the Redemptorist mission in that city.

Father Pockl was now in a dilemma. He could abandon Barbara and the Sisters, or he could leave the Redemptorists so that he could continue as their spiritual leader. After appealing to the Archbishop, unsuccessfully, he left the Redemptorists and Vienna and joined the Diocese of Linz, Austria. From there, as an associate Pastor in a small, village parish, he continued his support and guidance of the Sisters.

During the next couple of years, the Sisters suffered much from the persecution of the State government. The Redemptorists in Vienna also suffered. Finally, in 1848, the government expelled both the Redemptorists and Barbara Maix’s Sisters

from Vienna. This was all part of the general upheaval against the Church and Religious Orders at this time in Vienna.

In August of that year, Barbara, her Sisters, and Father Pockl travelled to Hamburg to board a ship for America. After waiting a month for a ship to America, nothing appeared. Barbara decided to travel on a cargo vessel, which had few other passengers and would leave her and her community more at ease for their community life. Merck, a cargo ship, finally appeared at the port. She asked the captain if it was going to America. His response was that he was going to Brazil and could take Sister Barbara and her community, as the only passengers.

Barbara accepted the offer; and left on September 15, 1848, together with twenty-two companions and Father Pockl. They arrived in Rio de Janeiro on November 9, fifty-two days later. As one of the Sisters commented in her diary, "We arrived in Rio de Janeiro with no money, without knowing anyone, without knowing the language, and very hungry; but full of faith in God and our Blessed Mother."

In Rio de Janeiro, the Sisters and Father Pockl met with the Bishop Manuel de Monte Rodrigues de Araújo who welcomed them warmly. Soon, they were fulfilling their dream of being an ecclesiastically and civilly recognized Congregation and they began their work of educating young girls in Rio.

Two years later, in 1850, Father Pockl fell victim to a yellow fever epidemic in Rio and passed away. He was a great loss to the Sisters. They, however, continued under the direction of Barbara Maix; and at the request of the Bishop in Rio Grande do Sul, moved their community there. It was in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, that the

Sisters finally established themselves. Today, their Motherhouse is still in Rio Grande do Sul, with several Provinces throughout Brazil, and Missionary Sisters working in Africa, Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela, Italy, Bolivia, Haiti, and the United States.

Presently, there are 852 Sisters; under the leadership at this time of Sister Marlise Hedges. The Sisters give wonderful witness to the original dream of their foundress by dynamic pastoral work in schools, hospitals, health care, popular movements, social outreach, with great attention given to the most needy. They expect that their saintly foundress will be officially recognized by the universal Church and beatified in the coming year.

As we know, the Redemptorist missionaries continued throughout the nineteenth century in their missionary efforts in North America; and subsequently spread into South America and Brazil. The American Redemptorists met the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters in Brazil and began a dynamic relationship which carried over into the United States, just as Barbara Maix and Father John Pockl dreamed there would be.



**Sister Rita (second from right),
with Sisters and Redemptorists
in St. James, Newark, New Jersey**

As we are very much aware, our Redemptorist history has many examples of Redemptorists partnering with other Religious to further a common ideal of working for the most abandoned. It will be our joy to celebrate with the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary the Beatification of their saintly foundress.

*Reprinted from Scala
Redemptorist Newsletter,
October 16, 2009*

CSSR History ... Continues!

by Serafino Fiore, CSSR

Several years after the publication of the Italian language edition of Volume I/I of the History of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (*The Origins* (1732-1793), the second part (I/II) has just been completed.

The contents of volume I/II complete Volume I with two chapters on the day-to-day life of the early communities as well as a synthesis of their spirituality. Documentary appendices on topics such as early texts of the rule, the habit, the Regolamento, a catalogue of the members (1732-1793), bibliographies, etc. conclude the volume. A separate companion extract booklet contains a rich collection of photographs of the early foundations, portraits of the first Redemptorists, their possessions, and maps of places where they lived and worked.

Sincere thanks and gratitude for this volume are due to Fathers Francesco Chiovaro (Naples Province) and Robert Fenili (Denver Province) who collected, edited and produced its content; also to Father

For Further Reading

Octávio Cirillo Bortoluzzi, *Documentário* (Grafica Dom Bosco, Porto Alegre, Brazil. 2nd ed., 1996).

Josef Heinzman, *Preaching the Gospel Anew* (Liguori Publications. Liguori, MO. 1998).

Antonio Marrazzo, Procurator General, who oversaw its publication and provided the visual materials; and to others cited in the book's introduction.

The results of all this work is a volume of 608 pages, in the same format and size as the first volume. Printing and publishing was done by our Redemptorist publishing house at Materdomini (the earlier volume was published by Rogationist Press). Six hundred copies were printed of which 200 are paperback. An additional 150 copies of the companion extract volume of photographs, portraits and manuscripts (218 pp.) were printed due to the special interest that there may be in these.



Title pages of the new volumes

The special purchase price for Redemptorists is 25 euros a copy for the softcover edition (the cover price is 50 euros). The hardcover copy is 30 euros (the cover

price is 60 euros). The softcover companion extract volume is 10 euros (20 euros cover price). Postage is extra.

The plan is to give each unit one copy of this Italian language version. If they wish, the members coming to Rome for the General Chapter can pick them up and take them home with them. Obviously, additional copies may be purchased as each province, vice-province or region desires.

As for translations into other languages, Father Antonio Pasquarelli, the Director of the Redemptorist Publishing house at

Materdomini (Valsele Tipografica), would be happy to make available a digital copy of the material and whatever else is necessary to anyone who wishes to make such translations. (N.B.: Father Robert Fenili of the Denver Province has nearly completed the English translation and hopes to have it available for printing in the next several months.)

We make use of this occasion to mention that Volume II/I of the History (The First Expansion: 1793-1855) is nearing completion. The chapters are written, and it is now ready to be edited, a task that will need more time. ***

Discovery of Lost Alphonsian Manuscript

By

Robert Fenili, CSSR

In May 2008, I was editing the material for the Italian text of the second part of the first volume of the *History of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (see previous article). In searching for some information on the Internet, I ran across the website for Georgetown University's Library that indicated that it held some manuscripts of St. Alphonsus Liguori in its Talbot Collection. (This collection was entrusted to the Library by someone who had a hobby of collecting manuscripts of Catholic saints.)

I contacted the curator of the collection and requested copies of these manuscripts and offered to cover any costs of reproduction. The curator graciously refused any compensation and sent me reproductions of three items. I recognized them as an undated handwritten letter of St. Alphonsus, a printed certificate signed by

him, and a page of notes. I then immediately contacted Fr. Giuseppe Orlandi, CSSR, of the Redemptorist Historical Institute, who is in the process of compiling a four volume critical edition of our Founder's correspondence.

Fr. Orlandi is currently probably the most knowledgeable person in the world on Alphonsus' correspondence. His critical edition will cover all known letters to and from the Saint. The first volume, published in 2004 and covering the years 1730 [earliest extant letter] to 1743, contains 296 letters.

After examining the material, Fr. Orlandi e-mailed me the following note in Italian:

Today I received your letter with the photocopies of the Alphonsian manuscripts.

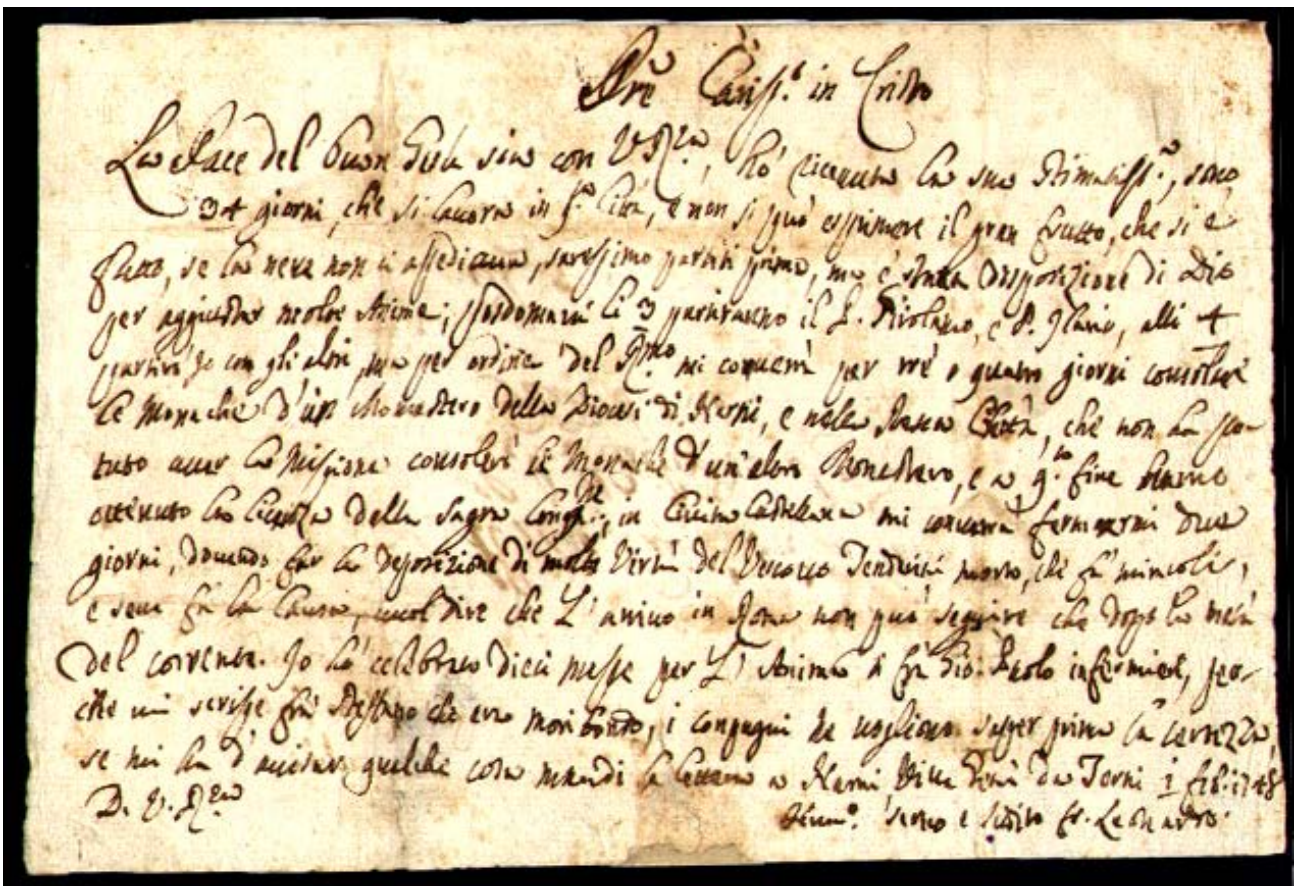
The first is a handwritten letter of 1755, probably before the month of June, since it speaks of the possibility of the general chapter being transferred to October, while another letter [we already have] dated June 10th of that year states that 'the chapter has had to be postponed until October (cf. **Lettere**, Vol. I, p. 288). The letter you sent me, after this first examination, is hitherto unknown and therefore unpublished. Thus, it is very precious.

The second manuscript is probably a draft for the book Translation of the Psalms (pp.793ff.)

The third manuscript (only the signature is in Alphonsus' hand) is an act of the curia of St. Agatha from 10 September 1768 which confers a benefice on a canon named Filippo Lucca.

I thank you for your fraternal and precious collaboration ...

When I first saw the manuscripts, I noted that the letter had been annotated and stamped by a former procurator of our Congregation. Thus, we are sure that the letter had at one time been in the possession of the General Government. At some point in the 19th century, some letters of Alphonsus were distributed as relics to various Redemptorist houses around the world with little or no record kept of where they went. Later, an effort was made to recover them or at least obtain copies; some had probably been lost in the meantime. This may have been one of them. How it came into the Talbot Collection is unknown.



And here is the letter found by Father Fenili in Georgetown University Library, proving yet again that St. Alphonsus's relics can be found across North America. Georgetown's website on the collection of manuscripts can be reached at <http://library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/talbot.htm>

West End in 2010!

Historians, Archivists, Friends will gather in West End, New Jersey, from Monday evening October 4 until Friday morning, October 8, 2010 to celebrate Redemptorist History in North America. The formal papers run the morning of Tuesday, October 5th to Thursday, October 7th.

Once every three years, the Institute for Redemptorist Historical Studies presents a conference open to the public. The speakers are already chosen; the topics in 2010 concentrate on biographies, especially of Redemptorist Brothers, special ministries (notably the ministry to the Deaf), and the relationships between Redemptorists and women religious congregations (as illustrated by Charles Hoegenroeder's article beginning on page one of this *Bulletin* issue).

One wag stated that we should title the Conference "Mothers, Brothers, and Others"! The actual title is not yet chosen – watch for the advertising in our next *Bulletin* – but what **IS** sure is that there will

much to learn and to celebrate about Redemptorist History in North America.

The historical scholars among us have been working hard over the past three years and are ready to present their findings in a rich and satisfying medley of anecdotes, biographies, histories, and meaning. This, the fifth conference organized and sponsored by the Institute for Redemptorist Historical Studies, is open to all interested people. But space is limited! Register early!

To register, contact the *San Alfonso Retreat House* in West End:

mary@sanalfonsoretreats.org

tel: 1-732-222-2731 ext. 140
fax: 1-732-870-8892

See you there!

**North American Chapter
of the
Institute for Redemptorist
Historical Studies**

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