



# GOOD MOTHER

## **1. CHRIST BEGINS HIS WORK WITHIN A SOUL. (1767 - 1784)**

On August 11, 1767 the tenth birthday of a little girl is celebrated in the large magnificent French chateau of the Chevalerie family. It is the birthday of Henriette, daughter of Louis Aymer de la Chevalerie, a renowned captain of the Piedmont Infantry. Henriette is proud not only of her father and distinguished ancestry, but also of her sixteen year old brother, Louis. He is a page of the Grand Ecurie in Versailles, and Henriette enjoys every moment she has to share with him when he visits the family during school holidays. It's difficult for her to say "adieu" each time he has to return to Versailles to resume his studies, but Henriette has a way of pulling through these sad moments of childhood, and manages to find a good companion and friend in her little brother Dominique. Together at play, their childlike joys and laughter are heard by their mother, Marie-Louise de Vesancay. Madame Aymer is a woman of glee and happiness, accustomed to the many luxuries shared by the affluent high class society of the eighteenth century.

Henriette finds herself treated like a little queen within the Chevalerie household. She naturally wins the hearts of all by her irresistible childlike traits. She is a beautiful child of light, chestnut brown hair, and blue eyes which sparkle happily about the beauties the world has in store for her. Yet more striking is the abundance of generosity and care for others that flow from this tender-hearted child.

Now, as the day of her tenth birthday comes to an end, Henriette reflects upon all that was said concerning the day of her birth. She was baptized the twenty-fourth of August, as

Louise-Victoria-Catherine-Henriette-Monique. Her godfather was the Count of May, and her godmother was the duchess of Chatillon. However, unable to attend the ceremony, these outstanding people were represented by Louis, her older brother, and Catherine, her young aunt. As Henriette quietly falls asleep she thanks God for the goodness He has bestowed upon her these past ten years; yet there remains unknown to her the wonderful visit she will soon receive from Him.

Before this great joy, God did not spare Henriette from first experiencing a share of His Cross, when on July 10, Louis Rene Aymer died. Henriette loved her father dearly, and his death was a very sad event for her. Nevertheless, Henriette still found generosity in her sufferings to forget herself and be a solace to her grieving mother.

The following year found Henriette as a boarder at Holy Cross, a Benedictine school in Poitiers. Here Henriette discovered the beauty of prayer and silence spend with God; while on the other hand, her professors found her to be very intelligent, attentive, and loved by all her friends. Henriette was gifted in all areas, from possessing a tremendous musical talent to having a skilled hand at fine needlework. It is, however, the beauty and goodness of her character that merited for her the title of "crossiere" at school.

## **2. A FLAME WITHIN THE TEMPEST. (1785 - 1805)**

In France during this epoch, the morale of the leaders of society was at its lowest ebb. The philosophical thought of the day is based entirely on a simple epicureanism which excludes any form of morality. Man's only goal is worldly pleasures and a false superficial happiness. The monarchy is gradually falling into a state of corruption, and even Marie-Antoinette is slandered by her people.

Madame Aymer and Henriette are very much aware of the evils infiltrating the heart of France at this time. In order to evade this chaos, they both decide to move to Poitiers. Here they would be near the Abby of the Holy Cross, so dear to Henriette and her mother; furthermore, they would have easy access to St. Hilaire, the parish church, and Henriette could once again make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Although these visits to the Blessed Sacrament meant so much to Henriette, they were a great chagrin for her mother who wondered how she could develop in Henriette a similar desire for the joys and pleasures of the world, - something that had always been a burden for Henriette. Even her acceptance in the Order of Malta in 1789, which comprised only nobility of honor, courage, and dignity failed to appeal to Henriette. Nevertheless, she accepted the title of "Countess Henriette", and participated with a good spirit; her sole desire being to please her mother who wished to see her as a brilliant light in society. But within herself, Henriette knew she was called to a different way of life, and every visit to the large romanesque church of St. Hilaire convinced her of this all the more.

In 1790 the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was not only a turning point in the history of the people of France, but also within the personal lives of Henriette and her mother. The Constitutional Assembly decreed the Civil Constitution for the entire clergy of France. This meant no more public worship of God, and all refractory priests had nothing to expect but death or exile; likewise those who sheltered them exposed themselves to death. In these days of terror, Henriette and her mother showed themselves worthy of their racial and religious heritage. During prosperity Madame Aymer sought the good things of life, but

during persecution her faith awoke, and in spite of all risk, she never hesitated to shelter priests within her home. Her own cousin, Father de Vezins died on the scaffold, and for having hidden Father Garrault within her home, both Henriette and her mother found themselves in prison.

In these painful days of seclusion Madame Aymer suffered much, and to relieve her fear of death, Henriette spoke to her only of deliverance and safety. Yet within her heart Henriette could only think of the many closed churches throughout France. She prayed very much for these priests who had to face persecution for their faith, and this in turn helped Henriette to strengthen her own convictions about Christ and His Church.

After the death of Robespierre in 1784, the organizer of the Reign of Terror, the persecutions abated. The prisons were less strictly guarded and disguised priests found their way in. One day, as Henriette received the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, God gave her the grace to make this a turning point in her life. She herself said: "If I confess, it must be fully and entirely with the resolution of an entire conversion and of refusing nothing to Him". This was the beginning of a new life for Henriette; she never again refused God anything. "If I had not profited by this grace", she said later, "I should never have been converted. "

In September of 1794 Henriette and her mother were liberated from prison and they returned to their home at Hautes-Treilles empty-handed, - for the Revolution had stripped Madame Aymer of all her fortune, and from now on luxury would be unknown to her. As for Henriette, poverty proved to be difficult at times, yet not an obstacle as she courageously took upon herself the work her maids had once accomplished for her. Henriette managed well and she remained happy. Yet Poitiers seemed dead to Henriette now that the Eucharist could no longer be found in the many churches of this beautiful city. A gnawing within Henriette to be near the Blessed Sacrament caused her to risk her life once again in search for people and places giving refuge to exiled priests. It was in this search that God enabled Henriette to meet Father Coudrin. Similar to Henriette, this priest also possessed a burning love for the Eucharist. He had spent several years now under disguised names, as he courageously went about France administering to the spiritual needs of his people. Usually he found shelter in an out granary known as Motte d'Usseau. It was Father Coudrin who introduced Henriette to the Association of the Sacred Heart, an organization dedicated to Perpetual Adoration in reparation for the many crimes of the French Revolution. The associates in the house adored during the night and the externs came at certain hours of the day. Henriette was an extern, and whenever she was free from household duties and the care of her mother, she would be at Rue Moulin-a-Vent, making an Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Perpetual Adoration was the attraction of her life, and from that time on she became its support. Henriette later wrote: "When you (Father Coudrin) established Adoration at Rue Moulin-a-Vent, and gave me an "Hour", you all unknowingly, fixed my destiny. "

Eventually Henriette was officially admitted to the society as a novice, - a novice hoping one day to become a religious even though all religious orders throughout France had been suppressed since the Revolution. Soon five other young girls followed Henriette in their desire to be received as novices. Together they comprised the "Solitaries". This little group was to be the grain of mustard seed which one day would become a great tree know as the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and of Perpetual Adoration.

The soul of this little group was Henriette; its guide, Father Coudrin. They desired religious life, and lived apart from the Associates. They wished so much to keep Henriette near them; for this young woman possessed a spirit of unity and love which attracted everyone to live a fuller life. For this reason, they asked for Henriette as their superior. This was granted by the Council of Priests in June, 1797. In this same year Father Coudrin admitted the Solitaries to pronounce the resolutions of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

In 1797 a second "Coup d'Etat" forced this newly formed little group to be re-established in "La Grand' Maison", situated in a lonely and quiet part of town. In the middle of the night of September 1797, Father Coudrin, Henriette, and the solitaries quietly made the move, carrying with them the Blessed Sacrament. On this same night, Perpetual Adoration began in "La Grand' Maison", the cradle of the Congregation. These early days were difficult and trying for both Henriette and the solitaries. Henriette's mother desired anything but the religious life for her daughter; her health was poor, and inner tension caused much upheaval and injustice within the community. Many times Henriette had no where to turn and no one to really understand her except Jesus in the Eucharist. Henriette knew that God would never try her or ask of her anything beyond her strength. This gave her the courage to always say, "Nothing is too much for God".

Eventually the difficulties of the community were resolved by the division suggested by the Council of Priests. Those who desired religious life formed a religious family under Mère Henriette, while those who desired to remain members of the Association of the Sacred Heart did so under the leadership of Mademoiselle de Viart. On June 10, 1800 the Vicars-Capitular gave the Association temporary approbation, and on October 17, 1800 Mère Henriette was elected superior general and Father Coudrin, ecclesiastical superior.

During the month of October 1800, Mère Henriette and Sisters Gabrielle de la Barre, Thérèse de la Garelie, Madeleine Chevalier, and Gertrude Godet pronounced temporary vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. That same day Père Coudrin (Brother Caprais), and his first two disciples, Brothers Bernard and Hilarion began their novitiate. This double grace was a great joy to the community, and God had others for them. One night as Mère Henriette prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, she saw our Lady who named herself special Protectress of the Institute saying she would always take care of all their affairs. A short time later our Lord revealed to Mère Henriette the aim of the Institute: "Our Lord wants an Order destined to adore His Divine Heart, to repair for the outrages It receives, an Order which should retrace the four periods of His Life: His Infancy by education; His Public life by preaching and missions; His Hidden life by Perpetual Adoration and " silence; His Crucified life by the practice of Christian and religious mortification.

This expressed desire of our Lord became a reality on Christmas Night of 1800, - the birth of the Congregation. Before celebrating Mass, Père Coudrin pronounced his vows forever. Then, ascending the altar, he celebrated Mass and accepted the Perpetual Vows of Mère Henriette. The other members of the Institute also had the same desire of final profession, and February 2, Feast of the Presentation, was fixed for the ceremony. On this day Père Coudrin received the vows of Brothers Isidore and Hilarion, while Mother Henriette received the perpetual vows of her first four sisters. Now the work of the Congregation began to flourish, yet accompanied by much pain and suffering. Sister Therese and Sister Madeleine died, and on April 30, 1801 Mère Henriette's mother died in the arms of her daughter. This was painful for Mère Henriette, yet she accepted all as a part of His design.

After the death of these two sisters the community counted only three professed and a few novices, - but God would soon send them new members.

France was passing through a new era. The Concordat accorded peace to the Church, and priests and religious were permitted the freedom of their state in life. For the little Congregation this meant the establishment of their first "House of Adoration" at Mende. In no time at all this small poorly furnished house found a room which was transformed into the Chapel, and Adoration began July 31, 1802. The people at Mende accepted the Sisters with open hearts and were delighted to entrust the education of their children into the hands of the Sisters.

From the moment the Sisters arrived at their new dwelling God gave them a pledge of His blessing. The water of a well, which was not drinkable, suddenly became pure and has always been used since, without the slightest inconvenience.

But above all, what rejoiced Mère Henriette was to see an ever-increasing number of young girls asking to enter. The house was poor, but God provided for the Sisters. One day, the community having to feed a large crowd witnessed the presence of God. Twenty to thirty pints of wine were drawn daily during ten days from a barrel containing only eighty pints, and still there was wine left!

Poitiers and Mende prospered, and already God prepared the way for another foundation. From Mende, Mère Henriette set off for Cahors. She traveled more or less after the fashion of St. Theresa; that is to say, under difficulties, yet gaily and always with a happy heart. Huddled together, the little caravan of Sisters advanced slowly, faithful to all their prayers. They recited the office, and in the evening they sang the Salve Regina. On July 15, 1803 Mère Henriette wrote: "Adoration has begun here. Pray that God may be adored in spirit and in truth. „Perpetual Adoration was the work of works for Mère Henriette and her sisters, and whenever a house was established adoration was always the primary purpose of the foundation. Many necessities were missing at Cahors, and poverty reigned supreme. "I know all you need," wrote Mère Henriette, who was so hard on herself and so sensitive to the sufferings of her Sisters, that they called her "La Bonne Mère", a cherished name that has always clung to her. Never did her communities know discouragement, as "La Bonne Mère" always had a kind word for them. Often she said: "Be always cheerful. Let the peacefulness of your soul show forth in the kindness and gentleness with which you treat others. "

Many times the Good Mother found herself either on horseback or walking in order to be with her Sisters either in Poitiers, Mende or Cahors. During these long journeys she relaxed none of her austerities, and instruments of penance encircled her body. She suffered greatly but would never be relieved.

### **3. ALL TO GOD, NOTHING BUT FOR HIM!**

In 1804 at the request of Father Coudrin, the Good Mother established another house on Rue de Picpus. Here over 1, 000 bodies were buried; people who had been loyal to their King. In this area known as "Barriere du Trone", were the sixteen Carmelites of Compiegne, beatified by Pius X in 1906. What a beautiful blessing from God for this little community de-

voted to reparation through adoration to find themselves on the very ground where so many martyrs of the Terror had given up their lives for a greater good.

Once established on the grounds of Picpus, the Good Mother, with the consent of Father Coudrin eagerly opened a "free school". Mère Henriette was happy in the midst of her little ones, and only God knows how much she loved the children of the poor as she did all she could for them and their families.

In 1804 quite providential circumstances led to the foundation of Laval. Père Nectou of the Society of Jesus had once predicted before his death all of the terrors of the Revolution: the persecution of the clergy, the religious, and the King; the schism, and all the scourges of this terrible time. He further predicted that out of the ruins would arise a new Institute with the principal work of Perpetual Adoration. He claimed that the Institute's birthplace would be Poitiers; that its members would consist of two branches wearing white habits, and that the first two houses would only be separated by a road. He also announced that one day religion would be re-established and priests and all religious liberated. All of this came true as Father Nectou had predicted.

An old tradition preserved at Laval tells us of the following happenings. One day at Hautes-Follies, the demon declared that later the house would be inhabited by religious who would torment him. Furthermore, the caretaker's little girl often heard singing within the house during the year preceding the Sisters' arrival on October 17, 1804. She could not understand the source of the singing. But when the Sisters arrived and sang the "Salve Regina" in the evening, the child recognized the voices which had so often charmed her. Later on, this little girl became a Sister of the Sacred Hearts.

Here too, the Sisters were poor, - nevertheless they were intent upon first opening a free school for children. Providence soon came to their aid and the school became one of the most flourishing of all.

For a long time the Religious of the Sacred Hearts had been asked for at Pontlieu near Mans. Mère Henriette and a few Sisters answered the call on June 3, 1805. The house was small and inconvenient, the resources slender, but what did that matter, God was there!

In 1807 another house was opened at Sees, Although very tired the Good Mother ate nothing until she saw that her Sisters' beds were made; hers was always ready, for an uncomfortable armchair sufficed her. The following First Friday Adoration began. Poverty remained the distinctive mark of this house; the Sisters had only boards laid upon two pieces of wood to sit on. Upon leaving her Sisters, Mère Henriette said: "I suffer at seeing you so poor, but I rejoice at seeing you happy and in good spirits. Be simple and united among yourselves, for upon that depends your happiness. „She also added: "You must expect hardship, but remember that God is always on our side; let us be on His."

Foundations became more difficult as Napoleon had decreed that no religious societies could be formed without his consent. The Sisters had to answer with caution as investigators did all they could to dissolve their work. In Paris, the Sisters had to abandon their habits and public prayers for fear of the government. However, this constraint was over at the fall of the Great Emperor, which the Good Mother had predicted six years before it actually happened. This enabled the Good Mother to establish another house at Sarlat despite the financial poverty of the Institute. Here again the Sisters had next to nothing, but they willingly abandoned themselves to Providence and to good Saint Francis Regis, who

somehow seemed to fill the Good Mother's coin purse when ends just didn't meet.

On November 1, 1817 the Holy See by a Bull Sub Plumbo, "Pastor Aeternus", granted a solemn and irrevocable approval to the work of the Congregation. This blessing proved to be a pledge of prosperity for the Congregation. On all sides new foundations were asked of the Good Mother, and in spite of poor health which always kept her more or less near death, the Good Mother never refused to answer the needs of the Church. In 1818 she opened a house at Rennes, and the following year two more houses at Tours and Troyes. Poverty seemed to reign supreme in all the houses of the Institute. However, this did not prevent the Sisters from opening and developing free schools. The children of the poor were always the first to be welcomed.

For more than thirty years now Mère Henriette and her Sisters spread throughout France. Many people admired the Good Mother for the greatness of her character which made the work of the Congregation a reality. According to Sister Gabrielle, Mother Henriette was a beautiful person. She was extremely gifted, quick, practical, capable of dealing with any situation and solving all difficulties; added to this, she had a strong will against which all obstacles broke like waves upon a rock. Yet she was always gay and cheerful, always giving her Sisters life and happiness. It was her gentleness and tender affection toward all that merited for her the name "Bonne Mère".

As the years grew in her loving service to God, so did her love for self-denial and reparation. For over twenty-nine years the Good Mother slept in an uncomfortable arm-chair. She wore a hair shirt and encircled her body with iron chains of sharp points. Those who knew her best saw other instruments of penance, but she never used them except by order of our Lord. Mère Henriette never desired such torment, yet she did as God asked of her, repeating constantly, "All to God and nothing but for Him!"

From 1828 the Good Mother felt her strength giving way, and the following year she was struck with paralysis. But this did not prevent her from continuing her work. In 1832 when the cholera epidemic broke out in France, the Good Mother sheltered many families and treated them with the best of care, regardless of creed or financial status

The years 1832 - 1833 passed quickly for Mère Henriette. A new foundation, - the eighteenth - came to brighten the last days of her life. A "House of Perpetual Adoration", as the Good Mother would always say, was established at Châteaudun.

On November 20th Mère Henriette's weakness alarmed the doctors who declared that her life was coming to an end. On Saturday, November 22, the Good Mother said her "adieu" to Father Coudrin and her Sisters. Then, with a smile on her lips, she fell into a coma until her death on Sunday, November 23, 1834. Upon her tombstone the following words were inscribed by her loving Sisters:

*Here, awaiting a glorious resurrection lies*

*MÈRE HENRIETTE AYMER DE LA CHEVALERIE*

*Canoness of Malta, born in the Chateau of La Chevalerie, Poitou,*

*on August 12, 1767. Under the direction of Father Marie-Joseph Coudrin,*

*she founded in 1887 the Congregation of the Religious*

*of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*

*and of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.*

*Despising the pleasures and joys of the world, she lived a life hidden in God with Jesus Christ. Her sufferings and long adorations merited for her a victim soul for the glory of God and the salvation of men. Her love, especially for little children was without limit. Her faith and confidence in God enabled her to render charity without limit.*

*A life devoted to the Sacred Hearts, she was always upright, kind, and sensitive. Because of her generous heart she was called "Bonne Mère".*

*After having founded eighteen Houses, she gave up her beautiful soul to God  
November 23, 1834.*

Even after her death, the spirit of the Good Mother always remained to help the Congregation spread throughout the world. Today the little mustard seed of the Sacred Hearts has spread throughout Europe, Canada, the United States, South America, and Africa. There is much to be done in contemplating, rendering present, and making known to others the great love of the Sacred Hearts.

This is the task of all Sisters of the Sacred Hearts; a task of love which the "Good Mother" has entrusted to all those who joyously desire to embrace a religious community devoted to making Love known throughout the world.

## **OUR LADY, QUEEN OF PEACE**

The members of the Congregation treasure the Blessed Mother's promise of constant protection to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. One night, as the Good Mother prayed before the Tabernacle, she saw our Blessed Mother, who named herself special Protectress of the Institute.

On May 6, 1796 this interior vision changed into a visible reality. On that day, the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Peace came into the Good Mother's possession.

The exact origin of the thirteen-inch, hard blackish-brown wooden statuette is unknown. Our Lady's delicately carved features are classical; her bearing queenly. Most unusual is her hairdo of several coils caught together in a knot at the back and hanging to her waist. In her right hand she holds an olive branch, the symbol of peace. On her left hand rests the little Prince of Peace, holding a tiny cross in His right hand and, in his left hand a globe.

From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, this statue was the prized possession of the noble French family de Joyeuse. Eventually through Henri de Joyeuse, who later entered the Capuchins, it was given a place of honor in the Convent Chapel. The most sensational cure was that of King Louis XIV in 1658.

When the Capuchins were forced to flee in 1790 the statue was entrusted to Madame Coipel who gave the statue to Father Coudrin. He accepted the gift on behalf of the Good Mother who confided the Institute forever to Our Lady of Peace.

The Good Mother's prophecy that one day the Congregation would owe its safety to Our Lady of Peace has been verified. It was during the Commune of 1871 that a strange thing happened. The man who rushed to seize the statue of Our Lady of Peace became paralyzed. Only the whispered prayer, "Holy Mary have pity on me", could relieve him. He changed his ways of living, and thereafter never missed Confession and Holy Communion on a Feast of Our Lady. He told a priest that whenever he wanted to swear or curse or even insult anyone, his tongue would become paralyzed, and the vision of Our Lady would pass through his mind. The prayer would again save him.

On July 9, 1906, the statue of Our Lady of Peace was solemnly crowned by Pope Pius X. Having arrived in Hawaii upon her feast, the first Sacred Hearts Missionaries placed the islands under the protection of Our Lady of Peace, and in her honor, erected the first Catholic Church. Is it not

true that Hawaii's Patroness has taken good care of her children? Comparatively little has happened to ruffle the peace of this Hawaiian paradise. That occupation by enemy forces did not follow upon the disastrous attack of Pearl Harbor may well be a proof of her special protection.

This is one of the many reasons why every Sister repeats very frequently: "Our Lady of Peace, pray for us, protect us, and save us!" It is at once a token of gratitude, a plea for protection, and an expression of love.

## **THE SACRED HEARTS IN HAWAII**

As members of the Catholic Church, the founders placed the Christian Education of Youth among the chief duties of the Congregation.

The Hawaiian mission was no exception. Faced with the task of evangelizing the natives, the pioneer Fathers found themselves handicapped where the training of children was concerned. Sisters were needed, and Sisters came, So began the missionary labors of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts in Hawaii.

Heroic indeed was the first band of ten who gave their lives on the Marie-Joseph. How true the statement: "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".

On August 26, 1858 the second group of ten Sisters left France for the Hawaiian Islands. Eight weary months elapsed before they arrived on May 4, 1859 to the "Promised Land". But it was "Paradise" only for those eager to make the Sacred Hearts known and loved, for scattered huts and a few wooden buildings made up the "town" of 1859!

A large crowd, headed by King Kamehameha IV and Queen Emma, had gathered to greet the strange women, even more strangely dressed. Amidst shouts of "Aloha Nui", the white-robed Sisters were lowered in a barrel!... to the waiting sampan.

These first Sisters soon realized that Hawaii had novelties to offer: Benediction hymns accompanied on a flute, and evening processions to the Convent with the candles the natives had naively snatched from the altar!

Despite the many adjustments, the Sisters did the best they could. On July 9, 1959 they opened their first boarding school, followed by a day school, then a free school taught in Hawaiian.

Today, under Bishop John Scanlan, who is so concerned about "feeding the lambs of his flock", - the Sisters continue to "kokua". The pioneer Sacred Hearts Convent at Fort Street was transferred to Nuuanu in 1939. Sacred Hearts Academy was founded in 1909 and Saint Patrick School was opened in 1930. Saint Anthony's Home has always had the unique task of serving Christ in His poor. Established in 1909 as an orphanage, the Sisters gave many little "keikis" maternal love and care. In 1960 the work of the orphanage had to be discontinued. A kindergarten was opened and the dormitories were used to accommodate groups for Retreats. Along with these activities the Sisters continue their daily task of supplying the diocese with altar bread. In these recent years, St. Anthony's Home is answering the "needs of the time", by working for the Right to Life movement in conjunction with the diocese.

Regina Pacis on Fifth Avenue was opened in 1960 as a House of Formation for the Pacific Province. It is at Regina Pacis that young girls contemplating religious life learn of the spirit of the Congregation, and receive their training as postulants, novices, and professed Sisters of the Sacred Hearts.

The work of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts in Hawaii has prospered much since they arrived in 1859. Regardless of where they are or what they do, the Sisters have one aim: to contemplate, to render present, and to make known the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary to the world.

*"Continue to depend on me after my death, and I promise to intercede for you in all your needs."*

*- The Good Mother*