

SR. ALMA PIA SPIELER, ASC

# DON'T FORGET YOUR ROOTS



TRANSLATION FROM GERMAN:  
SR. JOHANNA RUBIN ASC

“The spirituality of the blood of Christ is...the heart of the Christian life...Enter ever more deeply into this mystery of justice and love: make it known to the whole world,” said Pope John Paul II on the 200th anniversary of the birth of the ‘greatest apostle of the blood of Christ,’ as John XXIII called St. Caspar del Bufalo, when he prayed at his tomb for the success of the Council.

Anyone who has prayerfully contemplated the mystery of the blood of Christ must tell others of God's infinite love...

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*Thank you, “You holy women of Steinerberg”,  
Thank you, brave worshippers of the blood of Christ  
On six continents  
Who for 150 years and more  
Allowed God to make his covenant faithfulness  
To make visible,  
which Jesus sealed in his blood.*





*“... Never forget the origin that God gave you, the stone from which you were hewn, the cradle that nurtured your spiritual childhood...*

*St. Anna in Steinerberg will remain unforgettable and eternally dear to Mother Theresa's sisters as long as one of them still breathes on earth... But this story may tell their descendants... how poor, humble and obedient they lived, what streams of grace were poured out on them, what they suffered for the love of Christ...” wrote Claudius Perrot in 1853, five years after the death of the foundress to her co-sisters still living in Alsace, France. On 180 typewritten pages, “This History” recounts the “life, work and suffering of their foundress and first superior Maria Theresia Weber”.*

*The author then asks the sisters in the accompanying letter: “Isn't it true...that what I have written is only a faint shadow...compared to what you yourselves saw in these early perfected ones and so often admired in silence?” In the same letter, Father Perrot names the sources of his book: “...the rich communications of your first fathers at St. Anne's - Father Loser, Chaplain Holdener and Karl Rolfus - who so faithfully recorded everything they saw and admired in Blessed Mother Theresa and experienced with all of you...during the great time of trial in Switzerland...”*

Father Perrot was a Benedictine monk from Einsiedeln, spiritual director of the Benedictine nuns of the Au Adoration Monastery and friend of the “spiritual father” Karl Rolfus as well as the two priests in Steinerberg mentioned above. His “History of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood” at Steinerberg was the source of this booklet, along with the very detailed three-volume “Steinerberg Chronicle”.

*(Passages taken verbatim from the above sources are written in quotation marks and endings in the spelling used at the time).*



# 01 Two roots of the same trunk

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Only those who believe that the Lord God guides human history and transforms it into salvation history will “understand” the strange similarities between the Swiss foundation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ and the eleven years older beginnings in Acuto, Italy, which the “holy women” of Steinerberg joined as early as 1847.

The fact that both foundations were accompanied by priests is hardly surprising in the last century, but the fact that both “co-founders” wrote the “first rule of life” in prison is surprising, and that both the Roman Gaspar del Bufalo, canonized in 1954, and the militant Black Forest priest Karl Rolfus “atoned for their loyalty to the Church and the Pope” behind bars.

Both Maria de Mattias and Theresia Weber “encountered” the mystery of redemption in the blood of Christ as children and “lost” their young hearts to Christ. His shedding blood was for them “a sign, measure, expression and guarantee of God's love for every human being”. Because they knew that every person is “as precious as Christ's blood”, they wanted to teach people to know and love this good God at all costs. Yet these two foundresses were quite ordinary people.

Although they had recognized very early on their “calling to follow Jesus”, they both succumbed to vanity in their youth: Maria De Mattias admired her magnificent blonde hair for hours in front of the mirror and was always trying out new hairstyles. Theresia Weber “dressed cheekily according to the latest fashion” and almost drove her pious mother to despair.

Both experienced their “second conversion” during a popular mission and decisively and definitively laid aside all worldly adornment.

Even the names of their birthplaces are similar. Both foundresses are “girls from the valley”: Maria comes from Vallecorsa, which means “short valley”, Theresa from Glottertal, not far from Freiburg im Breisgau.

Both experienced extreme poverty and persecution. Both “rejoiced” - like St. Paul - “to share in the suffering of Christ for the Church”.

The fact that the young communities of sisters joined together in Steinerberg just two years after its foundation, despite the distance and language difference, is thanks to the “anti-convent” governments of the time. “God needs people” in order to write ‘straight with crooked lines’. We are involuntarily reminded of the verses of their contemporary F. W. Weber:

“All giants are but dwarfs,  
all masters are but poor servants;  
even if they want evil,  
they must promote what is right.  
They must serve order,  
even if they do the evil  
for the good is immortal,  
and the victory of God will remain.”

Although the similar foundresses had never seen each other on earth, it seems that God wanted to treat them both alike after their deaths. Both were given a solemn funeral and a grave of honor, and both found enthusiastic biographers in priests who knew them well: Johannes Merlini, Maria's advisor for 41 years, called his obituary “Compendio della Vita della Serva di Dio Maria De Mattias”, Father Perrot “Geschichte der Versammlung der Schwestern vom Kostbaren Blute im Leben, Wirken und Leiden ....von Maria Theresia Weber”.

However, the lifespans of the two great Adorers were very different: Maria Theresa died at the age of 26, almost exactly three years after the foundation of the community in Steinerberg; Maria De Mattias led her sisters for 32 years and died in 1866 at the age of 61. While the Italian Adorers were allowed to develop in number and apostolic fruitfulness despite all the difficulties in their home country, the German-speaking Adorers were scattered in all directions. This also explains why the testimonies about the holiness of Maria De Mattias led to her beatification in 1950 and to her canonization in 2003, while the testimonies about Maria Theresa

gathered dust in archives and were only discovered decades later, together with Fr Perrot's enthusiastic obituary.

Perrot's history of the Steinerberg foundation remains credible and impressive to this day - despite its outdated style - because he deliberately wrote it for people “who have experienced the content themselves and in some cases still do, and would like to pass on their experiences to their descendants as a family legacy”. (from the accompanying letter)



**Glottertal plase of bittth of M. Theresia Weber**

# O2 What will become of this child?

Mother Maria Theresa of the Precious Blood, as she was called in religious life, was born on July 7, 1822 in the picturesque Black Forest village of Glottertal. She was the third child of the Weber family and was baptized with her mother's name, Magdalena. Her parents were not only called Weber, they also ran a small weaving mill alongside their farm.

As the first two daughters died young, it is understandable that the mother took special care of her little Magdalena. The child was bright, but always sickly. Because of the closeness of her mother, who often prayed for and with her, the child very quickly developed a cheerful, natural love of God. Magdalena babbled the Lord's Prayer as her joyful language exercise at every turn. Her mother was also Magdalena's first religion teacher. When the child played next to her or practiced the Lord's Prayer, Mother Weber would explain: "This Father loves you and me and all people so much that he gave us his son Jesus." - "Does God also love bad people?" Magdalena wanted to know. "Yes, even the bad ones," her mother replied thoughtfully. "But he wants all people to be good, because only good people are truly happy."

When the little girl wanted to know where this good father lived, her mother explained: "He lives in beautiful heaven. But he is also here with us. He sees and hears us. He also looks into our hearts." - "Really?" the child doubted. "Do you see into my heart too?" The happy mother took her little girl in her arms, kissed her warmly and said: "If we are good and love each other so much, the good Father will take us to his heaven. Then I will look into your little heart, and you will look into mine, and we will be very, very happy." Magdalena wrapped her arms around her mother, beaming: "Will that be soon?" The mother's eyes filled with tears. She feared that this child might also die young.

Magdalena often became very quiet in the middle of the game, looked into the distance and asked questions like: "Mom, why are people bad?" Her mother wondered, then thought aloud: "Because others do something they don't like... If they're not happy with themselves..." "Then they hurt others, don't they?"... "God is always very good. God mustn't hurt anyone." The child got angry. The mother remained silent. How could she explain to her innocent daughter that sin is a conscious separation from God, a no to God's infinite love, a walking away from paradise?

Magdalena's childish questions forced her mother to rethink some of the truths of faith and discuss them with her husband. But he felt even more helpless in the face of the questions of the why and wherefore of the evil he experienced in the family, on the street, in the store or even in himself. Shaking their heads, the parents asked themselves more than once: "What will become of this child?"

Magdalena showed little interest in the noisy play of the neighbor's children. She preferred to stay at home with her mother, accompany her to the garden or the field, ask a

thousand questions and then ponder the answers for a long time in a quiet corner. She was a happy child, but hardly ever boisterous. She loved to walk hand in hand with her mother to the church where Jesus lived. However, she could not understand why she was not allowed to eat Him in the holy bread when she loved Jesus so much.

Was it this longing for Jesus that gave the barely four-year-old the experience of which she reported 20 years later that she had to "think about it every day", that it gave her strength and courage and made her "unspeakably happy"? In any case, the mother was not a little startled when one day the little girl told her, beaming, that she now belonged to Jesus forever; they had married today. When her mother cautiously asked who had told her that, Magdalena replied in astonishment, almost offended: "No one can tell me that. I know that. And Mother Mary was also there in the blood-red hall with all the golden lights." The mother didn't dare ask any more questions. Was her child living in another world? She only loved Magdalena even more deeply and watched over her life even more anxiously.

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When a little sister came along who also needed her tender affection, the mother discovered almost with satisfaction that the inclination to evil was not missing in Magdalena either. She did not want to share her parents' love with the newborn. Once, she who was supposed to look for the little sister, threw her under a bench, which earned her the first slap in the face from her mother. The slap, and the subsequent conversation with her mother, worked wonders. Magdalena quickly learned that love shared is doubled, and love given makes you twice as happy.



Maria De Mattias  
1805 – 1866



Maria Theresia Weber  
1822 – 1848

# 03 At the school desk in Glottertal

It's hard to say who was more afraid of entering the village school, the mother or Magdalena. Will the quiet, sickly girl be able to defend herself against the lively peasant children? Will they reject her shy nature and delicate health, laugh at her, torment her? The opposite happened. Magdalen's friendly shyness soon won the hearts of teachers and pupils. As she never failed to answer questions in religion lessons, performed excellently in other subjects and liked to help her weaker classmates with their tasks, she soon became everyone's favorite.

As soon as Magdalena had learned to read, she wanted to get to know her beloved God and his saints better through books. She wanted to put what she read into practice immediately. So she went "on a begging trip" with another girl - without her parents' knowledge, of course - to practice poverty and humility. When people showered the lovely child with kindness and sweets, even giving her wine to drink, she began to doubt whether this was the right way to please God. Fortunately, her mother also noticed and opened her eyes to the dangers to which she was exposing herself.

At the age of twelve, Magdalena began to prepare for her first confession and communion with much zeal. She never missed a lesson and not only memorized the catechism, but also knew a lot about the Bible. She loved to listen to what Jesus taught and did and could repeat many sentences verbatim. How she would have loved to call a Holy Scripture her own! After class and after the Sunday service, she wrote down the thoughts that had particularly impressed her in a notebook, which she read over and over again.

Her zeal - perhaps also her explicit request - prompted the pastor to quietly give Magdalena the body of the Lord on the Saturday before White Sunday

in 1835 - a year before her peers. "The joys I tasted at that time cannot be described in words," Magdalena confessed years later. Inner happiness needed no outer celebration.

Magdalen's pastor Willin was no less happy about his godly parishioner. His time in office was marked by "trials

and quarrels" that were contrary to God, by revolutions and dancing frenzies. "Many a servant sold his shirt..., the son of his father's wood, just to be able to dance. The dance floor is an old school for the wildness of Glottertal's youth," can be read in his record. Magdalena did not escape this "wildness" entirely.

# 04 Magdalen's tightrope walk

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Magdalen was unusually rooted in her faith and personal relationship with Christ. She loved solitude, consciously dressed simply and, together with her mother and younger sister, was one of the most faithful guests at the parish church in Glottertal. According to the custom of the time, they received the “bread of life” in the Eucharist as often as they were allowed.

The “sometimes enticing, sometimes mocking voices of the surroundings” were not long in coming. Magdalena was pretty, outgoing and friendly, as well as multi-talented. No wonder that many sought her friendship, invited her to dance and raved about which cut style and which color would look particularly good on her. For a while, Magdalena rejected all “offers” with disarming kindness. But when she prayed at home or in church, these temptations came back so forcefully that she was startled. Over time, Magdalena became accustomed to “dreaming” of beautiful dresses and jewelry, dances and walks for two. What was “bad” about that? Her peers were doing what she only dreamed of. Her mother noticed and warned her. “What did the old woman know about real life?” Magdalena thought quietly. The more space she gave to these thoughts, the less she “needed” the hitherto much-loved silence to talk to God.

One of Magdalena's aunts owned a “grocer's store”, which we might call a boutique today. She sold clothes and all kinds of jewelry, as young people loved to do. Magdalena liked to be employed by this aunt because she had two daughters her age. Together they tried on dresses and jewelry, first in the parlor, then as advertising on the street. Magdalena's “guilty conscience” began to stir, but she quickly assuaged it: “I'm not doing anyone any harm.” Her inner voice became quieter and quieter, less and less frequent. In order to

silence it, Magdalena finally outdid all her companions, so that one of them later testified: “Magdalena dressed very boldly according to the latest fashion.” Her mother's pleas and reprimands had no effect. One day, her mother threatened her: “If you don't give me that up, I'll chase you out of the house”. That stung. Magdalena remembered her childhood conversation with her mother 15 years ago: “Why are people evil?” - “Bad people hurt themselves, others and God. That is sin.” Back then, she couldn't imagine that anyone could be evil, but now she soberly realized: “I am evil. I have distanced myself from God, offended my mother and am no longer happy.” Determined, she cleared all the rubbish out of her closet, put her soul in order in confession and was surprised to find that she could pray with joy again and breathe more freely.

Reading in an old “Book of Virgins” made her realize many things clearly that she had only darkly suspected before:



I grow in prayer as long as I surrender myself to God's guidance.



I only become free for God and happy to the extent that I can let go of what I have grown to love.



If I do not put my prayers into practice, if I do not continue them in my work, I am deceiving myself. My piety remains “vain”.

At every stroke of the hour, Magdalene prayed the “Liturgy of the Hours” that she had learned from her mother. Each time, “I made the resolution to die rather than offend God with a single voluntary sin...”, she later confessed to her spiritual director.



# 05

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## God is worth everything to me

When Magdalena heard that a popular mission was being held in Blodelsheim on the left bank of the Rhine, she was determined to take part. Her father had reservations: "If the girl comes home over-excited, she can't be used for anything." But when a respected neighbor came by in the evening who also wanted to take part in the mission, the father's mood changed. He was proud to see his daughter accompanied by this woman.

The joy was full when the two pilgrims caught up with a group of other young women from Glottertal who had set themselves the same goal.

Magdalena spent three days preparing for her general confession. She wanted to offer her whole life to God anew, decisively, to let Him purify it so that He could use her. From the experience of her dangerous self-deception during the "tightrope walk" of the last few years, she asked God for a wise spiritual guide. The priest to whom she made her life confession recommended to her and her like-minded companions, the zealous and gifted seminarian Karl Rolfus, who was about to be ordained a priest,.

Relieved of her burden, Magdalena felt so happy that she wept for joy. She remained in front of the tabernacle for hours, thanking God and asking Him about His will for her future. She felt as if Christ Himself was renewing with her forever the covenant of fidelity that He had offered her in the strange "marriage experience" as a child. Now she began to suspect what her mother Mary had meant when she said: "You will have to suffer much, but I will always be with you. Many will find their way to my Son through you."

Magdalena suddenly knew that God would use her to found a religious community, together with the young women who had experienced the mission

with her. Her sisters were to kneel before the tabernacle and lovingly glorify God on behalf of all those who do not know Him, did not love Him, did not recognize Him as their Lord. Magdalena knew that this unity of vision was a gift and a task, a gift and a mission to pass it onto others. She was so enthusiastic that she wanted to fulfill the mission at all costs.

On the way home, the young women continued to pray and make plans for their future. They all wanted to belong completely to God and to obey Him, come what may.

The rehearsal was not long in coming. The people of Glottertal greeted the returnees with derision. It was a time when the reception of the sacraments was extremely restricted and pilgrimages and popular missions were banned in Baden as “fooling the people”.

Magdalena and her friends refused to be intimidated. They wanted to continue on their chosen path. They met regularly to pray together and encourage each other to do good

The appointment of young Rolfus as chaplain in Glottertal seemed like a gift from heaven. He quickly realized that God himself had led these women up to this point, and he said to his friend: “Either they will all become nuns or martyrs” He was right on both counts: these young women longed to enter a strict convent and die as a sacrifice of love for the crucified Lord, so that many - all - people would be saved.

They really no longer fit into the framework of their village, as Glottertal was then “a place of entertainment for the townspeople from nearby Freiburg...immorality and wantonness were rife among rich and poor”; the young chaplain Rolfus confirmed his pastor's judgment.

# 06

## On the search

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Rolfus was looking for a spiritual home for his God-loving protégés, but in vain. The monasteries in Baden were abolished, and the same fate threatened them in neighboring countries. For his zeal, Rolfus himself was “grounded for four weeks... and was transferred 40 hours away as punishment...”. But what people did to thwart God's plans only brought the young women closer to their goal.

One year under Rolfus' spiritual guidance was enough to strengthen Magdalena and “the 12 first foundresses” so firmly on their path of faith that no one and nothing could lure them away. Even at home, they lived a “stricter religious life” than most nuns. When the “sacristan opened the church at 5 o'clock and rang the prayer bell”, they were already waiting for the morning visit to their Lord in the tabernacle. Because their thoughts were also with God during work, they managed everything and there was still time for visits to their “Beloved”. They hardly knew any other needs. Magdalena often forgot even to sleep and eat.

Spiritual guidance was now provided in writing, which proved to be a challenge and a blessing for everyone. Because Rolfus also inspired young women in the new parish to give themselves completely to God in religious life, he also had to leave this parish after only a year. Because the “young priest...was incorrigible”, the annual punitive transfers gave him the opportunity to renew new congregations in the faith. People arrived from twelve to fifteen hours away... to receive the sacraments”. And again, young women came forward who wanted to belong entirely to God.

As no convent could take them in, the idea of founding a new convent came to mind. Rolfus began to reflect back God's guidance: on his study trips, he had

met the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Rome. At first, everything was far too “red” for him, but, although he was firmly against it, “...devotion to the Precious Blood was kindled in my heart.

I wanted to get to know this brotherhood better...and began to join it myself”. Rolfus soon felt that “the love for the divine blood, the desire for a virginal state of life and the zeal for the adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar were mysteriously connected” and nourished each other. It was then that he realized that God had “given him all the prerequisites for founding his own community of sisters. The spirit lay in the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. What drew the people so strongly to the community, they had drawn from the veneration of the Blood of Christ”.

Rolfus visited the Löwenberg Adoration Monastery in Graubünden, which had been founded by Anna Maria Brunner, the mother of Franz Sales CPPS.

In the same year, Ursula Behringer, a native of Wellendingen, made a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine in Einsiedeln. She continued her pilgrimage to St. Anna in Steinerberg.

The quiet village between the Mythen and Rigi mountains immediately appealed to her. The two clergymen - Pastor Loser and Chaplain Holdener - were aware of their northern neighbors' need for faith and they welcomed the pilgrims hospitably and made the hospitality particularly solemn for them. Ursula would have preferred to stay in Steinerberg. Back home in the Black Forest, she dreamed of the Swiss mountains and the shrine of St. Anne. Just a few months later, she ventured on her two 28-hour pilgrimages on foot to central Switzerland. She gathered her courage and asked to speak to the local priest.

“Steinerberg is such a good place to pray,” Ursula began shyly. “I would prefer to stay here.” “Why not? We could do with women like you praying especially during these anti-church times,” said the priest.

“We are a group of young women in Baden who want to offer our lives completely to God in adoration and reparation for the glory of the blood of Christ.”

“In honor of the blood of Christ,” the chaplain repeated, as if electrified. “Christ's blood has also been venerated here for years, and the



parish priest has the authority to admit us to this Archconfraternity.”

Ursula beamed: “We are all members of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. That's why we want to gather in a convent, to stand up day and night before God as a community for the salvation of the world. Would something like this be possible in Steinerberg?”

“We are probably poor,” thought Chaplain Holdener, “but we could provide a building. He remembered that his priest friend had bought the empty monastery “St. Maria auf der Au” near Steinen.

“May I tell our spiritual director about this?” Ursula asked happily and could already see herself and her companions kneeling in front of the altar in St. Anna's Church.

The two priests were delighted with the young woman's eagerness. They filled her pilgrim's bag with provisions and sent her off on her journey home with a greeting and blessing.

Ursula immediately went to see Karl Rolfus. He could hardly believe it. Without hesitation, he clarified with Pastor Loser all the details of the longed-for foundation, first in writing and then verbally.

On the way to Steinerberg, Rolfus took long detours to seek advice from experienced people. First, he knocked on the door of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Dreiähren near Colmar, then at the Priory of Mariastein near Basel. He met Bishop Mirer of St. Gallen at the Mount Sion Adoration Monastery. They all encouraged him in his plan and promised prayerful support. Finally, Rolfus returned to Our Lady of Einsiedeln, where he met Father Claudius Perrot, who became a faithful friend and advisor to the new foundation.

Loaded with blessings, the pilgrim reached Steinerberg on June 18, 1845, “the cradle” that was soon to receive the “spiritual childhood” of the Adorers of the

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Blood of Christ. The parish priests welcomed the young Rolfus like a dear old friend. His bold plans coincided so perfectly with theirs that the foundation of the convent was soon a foregone conclusion. Pastor Loser not only confirmed his promise to provide a house, he also undertook to obtain permission from the Bishop of Chur and to negotiate with the municipal and cantonal authorities. Until the convent “auf der Au” was habitable again, he wanted to provide the sisters with the Church's own Sigristenhaus opposite the parish church.

Rolfus immediately asked the General Moderator of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Rome to send him the Rule of Life for the Adorers. He waited in vain; there was no written rule yet, only a lived one. So Rolfus decided to write one himself, even though he had “never read a Rule of Life before”. He knew the “spirit” of the first sisters and knew what he could expect of them. They were used to a hard life and had often experienced that “sacrifices” were the most effective way of nurturing love for God and people. The rule of life therefore had to curb their zeal rather than spur it on.

# 07 A home away from home

Rolfus had scouted out the founding site in June, and the first group of women willing to join the convent arrived in Steinerberg in August. Nothing had been prepared. It is hard to say whose embarrassment was the greatest: the local clergy, the family of the sacristan, who still lived in the “temporary convent” and ran an inn, or the future sisters, who had burned all their bridges behind them with the solemn promise never to return home.

Where there is a will, there is a way, especially for people who have dedicated themselves to Christ, the way. In Rolfus' notes we read: “God's providence had prepared everything wonderfully... especially in inner Switzerland, the idea emerged of introducing perpetual adoration as the most excellent means of salvation for our time, both in the convent and in the world.” This “preparation” helped the sacristan's wife to welcome the Adorers. The first night they slept on the bare floor with the travel bundles under their heads. This corresponded to the “greatest simplicity” that Rolfus had learned from his sisters in the Löwenberg convent. “This is how everything begins that has its origin in heaven and is only allowed to put down makeshift roots in the earth,” concludes the historian.

Rolfus was now back in prison, abandoned by secular and ecclesiastical superiors, hated and shamelessly slandered by his enemies. “I suffered, wept and prayed,” confessed the courageous priest, “otherwise I knew nothing else to do...You Sisters of the Precious Blood...came forth from the love wound of the divine heart on the cross.”

The Glottertal Adorers in Steinerberg soon realized this. With the best of intentions, but without knowing the woman, Rolfus appointed a former Adorer from the Löwenberg convent as the first superior, “because she had

experience in religious life". But she was "of a completely different cast and spirit...and wanted to set up a kind of coffee society where people prayed, chatted and drank coffee...Moreover, the tavern on the left and the convent on the right had only one common entrance from the street."

Human wisdom would speak of irresponsible gaps in planning; Rolfus' faith "saw" God's wise guidance behind this, which once again wrote salvation history "straight on crooked lines."



House where the sisters lived

# 08 Convent or boarding house?

“The actual foundress of the new spiritual family” came to Steinerberg a few weeks later with several young women from ‘Rolfus’ spiritual school”. They were shocked. This was not how they had imagined religious life. Rolfus responded to their disappointed letter with cruel harshness: “If you do not submit to the circumstances more calmly, I will send you away without delay”

Fortunately, Theresa's complaint and his reply left him no peace. He traveled to Steinerberg, saw the “disorder”, sent several non-appointed sisters home and advised the sisters to “choose Maria Theresia Weber as their first spiritual mother.” She was only 23 years old. Although she would have preferred “to be the last to serve everyone”, she obediently accepted the office. Serving God in people was her passion. If she was not allowed to do it “last”, she wanted to do it “first”. The young leader was to continue to write with her life the rule that was drafted in prison.

With “winning impartiality, she got rid of one abuse after another”. She spoke little and quietly, prayed a lot and set an example of what she expected from the others. The sisters quickly became infected by their “spiritual mother”. The unity of purpose replaced the religious habit for the time being.

Father Loser soon succeeded in persuading the Sigrist family to vacate the house before winter. His personal commitment also persuaded the population to furnish the house “monastically” for “their Sisters”.

On November 4, the door was closed to the outside and marked “Klausur” (cloister). The “convent” was born. The priests were happy to explain to anyone who wanted to know: “Klausur” and “Kloster” are Latin words derived from claudere = to close.

Now the dream of the young women from Baden was fulfilled: They had left the “world” behind them, living as a community under one roof, voluntarily enclosed as God's property. Anyone who wanted to speak to a sister in future first had to ring the convent bell and find out from the porter whether the person they wanted could come in now.

It was not easy to obtain a residence permit for the “pious women from the Black Forest”. The federal “Klostersturm” had only taken place a few years previously, and hostility towards the church did not stop at the Swiss border. Taking over the elementary school for girls seemed the safest way forward. Rolfus knew this and included girls' education as the first point in the rule. Of course, the two German teachers had to face the federal examination board. Instead of promising wages for their work, the government demanded a “deposit of 800 Swiss francs”. In return, the two teachers were allowed to accommodate all their companions as “boarders”.

Was it prophecy or God's humor that these women:

-  who longed only for silence and adoration before God,
-  who endured extreme poverty,
-  who bore even hunger and cold with joy,
-  all “in atonement for the world alienated from God”,

Was it prophecy or God's humor that now they were only allowed to exist as a “school”?

The Italian Adorers of the Blood of Christ, founded by Maria De Mattias and soon joined by the Steinerberg group, worked for over 100 years mainly in the education of girls.

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There was such unity among the sisters of St. Anna, such attentive mutual helpfulness, such zeal for good and such infectious joy that the walls could not contain their radiance.

The monastery acted like a magnet. At Christmas, barely four months after the arrival of the first Adorers, more than 30 young women were already filling the shingle house

opposite the parish church. Several of the sisters were Theresia's school friends. They had witnessed her "tightrope walk", her alienation from God and her decisive conversion. Now they considered themselves fortunate to walk with her on the high road of faith and love for their crucified and risen Lord, whom they loved to call "our Blood Bridegroom".



# 09

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## A Name Obliges

It didn't take long for the sisters to realize that only “blood brides” were suitable for a “blood bridegroom”. They had known it in their hearts for a long time. In everyday life, the “spiritual mother” helped them to understand step by step what secret was at work in their name.

Years ago, they had registered with the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. Since then, they felt “a new ear and a new eye” in their hearts. When they heard or read about what Jesus had suffered for people, their eyes filled with tears. For hours they pondered the mystery of God's love, the sign of which is the blood shed by Christ. How could they give thanks for this? How could they make people aware of this love?

When Mother Theresa opened the recreation after lunch, the only time in the day when the sisters chatted “unnecessarily” with each other, they found it difficult to find another topic of conversation.

“We can never earn the kind of love that Jesus has for us,” said Sr. Xaveria.

“Deserve?” pondered Sr. Cölestina, “I would rather give thanks for it.”

“Yes, me too,” added Sr. Rosa,” but how?”

“There are many ways to give thanks,” the spiritual mother points out. “If you think about it, you are already giving thanks, because gratitude is the memory of the heart.”

“Great, I want to remember that,” says a delighted Sr. Xaveria, who was the first to find her way to Steinerberg when she was still called Ursula.

“When I think of our name 'Adorers of the Blood of Christ', I am bursting with joy and feel really 'precious', reflected Maria Anna Kamer, the first native of Steinerberg to join the St. Anna convent.

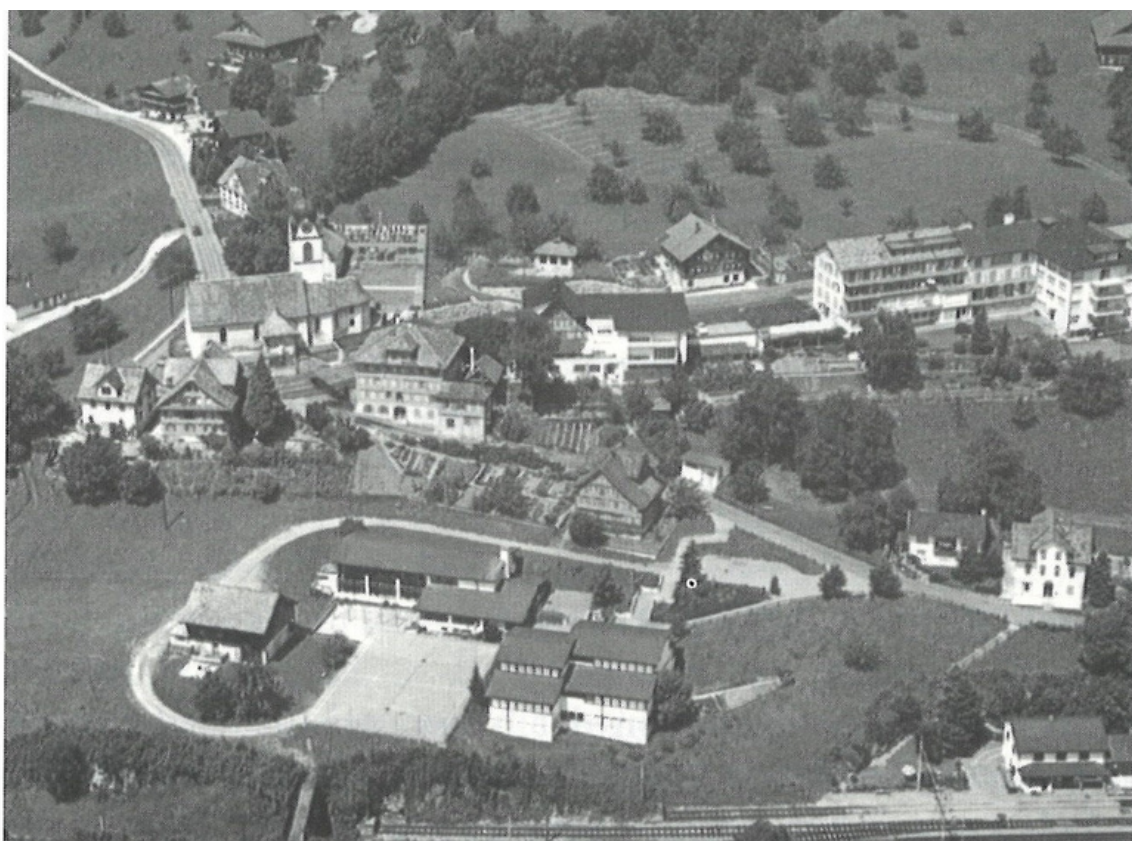
“Every person is precious... as precious as Christ's blood,” Mother Theresa continues her youngest sister's thought. “That's why nothing should be too difficult for us, so that all people for whom Jesus shed his blood, can be saved... Let's remember that this afternoon when something gets in our way.”

“Hopefully something will get in our way,” mused Sr. Verena, who easily manages every task.

“Don't overestimate yourself, you lucky one,” warned Mother Theresa and ended the rest with the greeting: “Praise be to the blood of Christ!”

“Now and forever,” the sisters reply in unison and then move on, each to her work. Their thoughts continued unhindered to circle around God, the radiant center of their lives.

In this center, the Adorers experienced being together as a gift, and they thanked each other for it with looks that spoke more clearly than many words.



**Steinerberg convent of St. Anna below the parish church**

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# 10 Love does such things

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Mother Theresa had the gift of giving clear instructions with just a few words and inspiring consent with her gaze. Although her sisters were very different in disposition and temperament, she found the right tone for each of them. She read from each sister's eyes what she needed at the moment, and how much she could expect each of them to give up or do.

Because the spiritual mother loved all the sisters dearly and at the same time knew that they had all given their young hearts to God, she did not see her ministry as a burden. Nor did she worry too much about the future. She believed what Paul had written to his Corinthians: "To those who love God, all things work together for good: success and failure, praise and slander, health and illness, even their own mistakes."... "God is faithful, even when we are unfaithful," she also read in a letter from Paul. She could rely on God. And she did.

The sisters were only allowed to fulfill their ardent wish for adoration before the Blessed Sacrament in stages; they had even written this into the title of the community. The parish priest knew how suspiciously the authorities were watching the foreign women and put the brakes on their zeal "as a precaution". The brakes acted as a stimulus. So, the Adorers, dressed in clerical attire, with the exception of the head covering, which was similar to a woman's hat, stole into the church at different times of the day and remained in silence before their Eucharistic Lord for different lengths of time.

"With the new year 1846 ... they took more courage." In addition to the scheduled visits to the church, two sisters prayed aloud before the tabernacle every hour from six in the morning until eight in the evening.

Four times a day the whole community gathered in the parish church: to attend the Eucharist, to accompany Jesus contemplatively on his way of the cross, to venerate Mary in the rosary, and in the evening to bring the day's harvest before God in thanksgiving.

The priests and the population were most deeply impressed by the “change of hours” of the Adorers in the evening, when everyone was present. “They prostrated themselves on their faces on the hard stone floor at the steps of the altar ... lingered for a moment ... stood up and recited the 'Thrice Holy' ... It was not a chant, nor a mere prayer ... it poured out of the hearts of all ... as no musical artist could ever invent, because the intensity of their total love resonated ...”

The sisters always began and ended the adoration with their favorite powerful prayer: “Eternal Father, we offer you the precious blood of Jesus Christ as a ransom for our sins, for the poor souls in purgatory and for the needs of the holy Catholic Church.” This prayer, linguistically adapted several times, of course, is still part of the daily prayer treasure of Adorers around the world, alongside the hymn by Maria De Mattias.

Soon, adoration during the day was no longer enough for the sisters. They continued it at night. In a room whose window offered a view of the sanctuary light in the parish church, two sisters kept watch for an hour each to keep company with their “Lord imprisoned in the tabernacle out of love.”

Many years later, the last Steinerberg Adorer living in the USA testified to how great her desire was to “please God” in everything at all costs: “There was no preparatory year for religious life in Steinerberg. It would only have been necessary to put a stop to the fervent zeal in prayer and mortification.”

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# 11 God cannot be outdone in generosity

The Precious Blood Sisters experienced this truth hundreds, even thousands of times during the three years of their life in Steinerberg. They were constantly able to feed and clothe the poor at the gate generously, even “lavishly”, because God replenished their supplies. He rarely did it in advance. The sisters often suffered bitter hardship. But when they had given the last handful of flour to a poor woman, they found that the flour trough did not remain empty. Two incidents in the Steinerberg Chronicle shed light on how much trust God placed in them and how naturally the sisters knew how to interpret even the most bitter events as a sign of His love:

In November 1847, the chronicler tells us that they were very cold because they had no wood at all, not even for cooking. During their recuperation, they decided to make a novena “in order to receive a really warm love...so we would no longer be cold. This love did not become so burning...but we did get wood.”

Once when they had nothing left to eat, the convent was threatened with military occupation. The sisters found refuge in families. When they were able to return to the convent after a few days, they thanked God who had saved them from hunger in such an ingenious way.

Rolfus, who was ultimately responsible for the upkeep of the convent, also spoke of the miraculous increase in food and money. He had made himself a tireless beggar for his sisters. But when he was imprisoned, the shipments stopped. In order not to constantly challenge God's providence, he wrote a “covenant booklet”, as was customary in the monasteries of the time. The sisters prayed every day for all those who purchased the booklet for a “crown thaler”. The Bishop of Chur allowed the booklet to be printed “with the request that I be accepted as the neediest.”

Such benevolence on the part of the Bishop of Chur for a new foundation of foreign nuns in his diocese was in itself a sign of divine generosity. Bishop von Carl knew the mood of the Swiss authorities with regard to the Church and monasteries. He knew that he was exposing himself to criticism when he stood up for this community. He did it anyway because he was convinced from the outset that the “religious winter” in the community needed the “embers” of the faith and love of these women so that spring could return.

This courageous shepherd must also have been pleased when he read a long article about the “small Institute of the Precious Blood in Steinerberg” in the “Beilage zur Süddeutschen Zeitung” No. 5 on January 5, 1847: “...This much is certain, that ...the Catholics in Switzerland realize only

too well that nowadays nothing can ward off the coming destruction more than united prayer. Among all devotions, however, the devotion to the Precious Blood is undoubtedly gaining the upper hand in Switzerland and is spreading everywhere; indeed, recent times have shown that a special prayer association has come into being in Switzerland under the name “of the Precious Blood”, which many Swiss bishops have already confirmed and recommended. The Catholic Swiss thus see that the precious blood of Jesus Christ is the last and only means of salvation by which we can now escape the general threat of perdition, and that we must sprinkle the gates of our hearts with the precious blood of Christ so that the angel of perdition may pass us by...”



# 12 “Everyday life” in the Sr. Anna convent

It is difficult to say whether the Precious Blood Sisters of Steinerberg ever experienced a “gray” everyday life. The day was probably precisely regulated from four in the morning until nine in the evening, i.e. divided according to their rule of life. But because it alternated between prayer and work, silence and rest, in accordance with the sisters' desire, it seemed to them like a “feast without end”, the shortest way to the eternal feast of joy with their “blood bridegroom”. In their youthful enthusiasm, they experienced the “obstacles” along the way as welcome tests of strength for the authenticity of their vocation.

Getting up at four o'clock in the morning was no great imposition in itself, as they also experienced the sunrise in the fields on their fathers' farm in the summer. The fact that a sister did the rounds every day and woke her fellow sisters with “Praise be to the blood of Christ!” ensured that they all got off to a good start. They were able to live up to their name for another day...

They felt that the first hours of the morning were a welcome privilege to encounter God. After the Eucharist, they stayed in the church for a long time to give thanks for the Bread of Life. Then they silently treated themselves to a hot flour soup for breakfast and put their rooms in order. They arrived punctually in the common room, where the day's work awaited them: sewing and embroidering, knitting and crocheting, lace-making and handicrafts initially seemed like a pleasant “pastime” to the peasant girls, as they were used to hard field work at home. They had learned fine needlework from their mothers only on Sundays and long winter evenings by the warm tiled stove. Now they were learning from each other. They worked to order or to stockpile as a contribution to their livelihood. The particularly talented ones made artistic flowers from silk and paper, which were very popular at the time as winter decorations for church and family celebrations. When selling their works of art,

the sisters were only allowed to charge the cost of the materials. The contribution for their work remained voluntary. The spiritual mother often “paid” the benefactors and other visitors with the magnificent pieces from the convent workshop. The sisters preferred to embroider mass vestments because they served God and people at the same time.

At every stroke of the hour, the sisters knelt on the parlor floor and said the Hour Prayer together, a hymn of praise to God's love and a plea for the salvation of all people. The Hour Prayer had the effect of a profession of faith, a return to the center if one of the sisters had strayed from it in her thoughts. Every hour, two sisters left the room because they were allowed to relieve the other two in front of the tabernacle in the parish church. Their beaming faces proved that the Holy Spirit dwelled in them, transforming every “must” into a “may”.

At lunchtime, a hearty vegetable soup was steaming on the table. Everyone ate a piece of brown bread with it. Reading aloud from a spiritual book spiced up the poor sisters' meagre meal. The fact that the spiritual mother herself served each sister at the table with winning attention turned the meal into a family celebration.

The Adorers took turns in the kitchen and at the gate every day. Apart from the school, these two offices took up the most time. Every day, 30 to 40 poor people knocked on the convent door. Everyone was given bread and a bowl of warm soup at all times of the day. That was all the sisters had. Because the convent at St. Anna “had no storehouse, no cellar, no pantry...nothing at all”, and yet the sisters “continually gave abundant alms in food, money and clothes...”

Exaggeration by the historian? Hardly. After all, he was writing at a time when the eyewitnesses could give him the lie.

During the half-hour of recreation after lunch, the sisters sang to their heart's content, shared their experiences and laughed heartily about the little adventures they had had during the nightly change of hours in the dark.

The afternoon belonged to manual labor again, and after the meager evening meal, the sisters had ample time to reflect on the day before their Lord and to thank Him.

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# 13 Education that sets you free

The “feast without end” also knew high feasts. Soon after the first Christmas in the convent, which the Adorers had celebrated in a living union with Mary and Joseph in extreme poverty and blissful joy, the first vows were taken in January 1846. After four months of probation, the sisters received the religious habit and solemnly promised God to live poverty, chastity and obedience like Jesus. Mother Theresa had prepared them for this through her life, and the Jesuit Father Cathani from Schwyz through his inspiring conferences during the retreat.

At the banquet, even though there was the tantalizing odor of the roast on the table and where cake and coffee were waiting for dessert, the conversation revolved around the three “evangelical counsels”.

“Why do you solemnly promise to live poor?” asked Barbara Mader from Lucerne, who was accepted into the community a few days ago. “Poverty can hardly be a goal worth striving for...”

“That's right,” replied Mother Theresa Poverty is not a goal, but a means on our path to God. We give up external securities because we believe that God will provide for us. We claim as little as possible for ourselves so that our hunger for eternal goods can grow...”

“And so that we can share with even poorer people”, added the porter, who had just pressed a large piece of cake into the hands of a child.

“For me, the vow of virginity is the most important thing”, Sr. Christina thought aloud. “Why?” asked Magdalena Styger from Steinerberg, who had followed her friend Maria Anna into the convent barely 24 hours later. “Because virginity tells me and the others that I want to belong completely to God, that he is number one in my life...Because Jesus and Mary lived virginally...Because, yes, because it seems to me that I am already halfway to heaven.”

“And obedience?” Maria Anna spoke up again. She had decided to enter the community because she liked the radiant faces of the Adorers.

“For me, obedience is a necessary consequence of virginity”, the spiritual mother rejoined the conversation. “If I belong completely to God, as Sr. Christina said, then I also want to do what God wants me to do at all costs.”

“Yes, I understand,” nodded Maria Anna”, but how do I know for sure what God wants from me?”

“Through our spiritual mother,” blurted out several sisters who had been listening to the conversation about the vows. The others nodded with conviction. “Our mother loves God so passionately that she senses with certainty what God wants from each of us.”

“But she also asks this or that sister for advice and prefers to follow the opinions of others rather than her own. And again, and again she asks for prayer so that she can properly fulfill the responsibility of the ministry.”

Maria Theresa blushed and looked away. Then she turned back to the sisters and said: “I am also still learning, still listening. Obedience is only a yes to what we hear when we belong to God. Didn't Father Cathani tell us: ‘Those who only want to hear themselves will hear the devil more easily?’”

# 14 Run to win the crown of victory

With such an attitude to life, it is hardly surprising that the sisters' longing to be with God always inevitably grew. They competed in obedience, in poverty, in mutual love. The long times of prayer seemed far too short for them. They lived daily what Paul tried to explain to the first Christians: "I desire to be dissolved in order to be with Christ." They would have preferred to do without sleep and food... The spiritual mother, who herself had been living on "tea and a piece of bread" for years, had trouble taming the sisters' zeal.

Soon the first Adorers fell seriously ill. Was it their unwise youthful zeal or God's understanding love for their longing for heaven? The doctor who was called in gave little hope. In her fever, Sr. Meinrada was already talking to her deceased mother and her little brother, who had followed their mother as an infant. The cheerfulness of both the sick and the healthy confused the doctor when he saw the extreme poverty of the convent rooms. He prescribed hearty food, undisturbed sleep and regular drinking of certain herbal drops.

Sr. Meinrada, whose condition was most precarious, occupied the only "private room" that had a stove. Despite careful nursing care, her last strength quickly waned. When the sisters wanted to encourage her, she comforted those left behind with her cheerful farewells.

Soon everyone was convinced that Sr. Meinrada would be the first to be allowed to move to eternity because she was God's special favorite. When she died, everyone wept with pain and joy at the same time. In a mixture of shyness and longing, they asked each other which one would be allowed to follow her to her eternal home first. They did not have to wait long. In August, Sr. Franziska's fever was soaring. She was determined to get up and go to church. When the sisters honored her, she asked: "Don't you hear that Jesus is calling me? Yes, Sr. Meinrada is coming to fetch me."

In March and April 1847, the sisters stood in front of a fresh grave almost every week. The relatives took notice. Parents and siblings wanted to bring their daughter or sister home. They promised them everything that would make a young woman's heart beat faster, but it all fell on deaf ears. Neither pleading nor threatening helped. No sister in St. Anne's could imagine anything more beautiful and desirable than living and dying in this community. The relatives returned home. They knew - even if they couldn't understand it: These young women were completely happy. They possessed in abundance what others were desperately searching for: joy and the meaning of life.

This is also proven by Maria Theresa's letter, which she wrote to her sisters from her sick bed on her 24th birthday. The doctor and the prayers of the community had saved her from imminent mortal danger, but not to her joy: "...Wish me a blissful death on this day", she begged. "It often seems to me that God is only dining with me... When I think I have the king in my hand, he comes away and I am alone again..."

The spiritual mother recovered, but death continued to reap its early harvest among the worshippers, who considered themselves lucky when Brother Death knocked on their door.

# 15 Tested like gold in the fire

The growing number of fresh graves in Steinerberg did not deter young women from near and far from asking to be admitted to St. Anne's Convent. On the contrary. After barely a year, over 50 sisters were living there. The cramped house could no longer hold them.

The good parish priests, who had undertaken to provide accommodation for the sisters, were delighted with the good spirit and the growing number of Adorers. At the same time, the uncertain future weighed on them. Was there even a future for these sisters in this world?

In the spring of 1846, Pastor Loser asked a spiritual friend to visit the community as an “ecclesiastical visitator” in order to form an “objective judgment” about their lives. His report read: “I believe that the congregation of St. Anna... will flourish and continue to exist despite all obstacles... Only those who have the right spirit of the St. Anna sisters... and fit into ‘their mold’ can remain in this association...”

What he meant by this can best be described as “heavenly arithmetic”, as W. Bergengruen called one of his 'Christian' poems. The Adorers of Steinerberg were convinced by the reversal of the usual order of values and therefore lived it convincingly:



The quieter they became, the louder the eternal WORD spoke.



The more courageously they took steps into the darkness, the more clearly they saw the WAY ahead of them.



The more obediently they did God's will, the more deliciously they experienced their FREEDOM.



The less they esteemed the wisdom of humans, the more they recognized the TRUTH.



The more joyfully they shunned pleasure, the more they were flooded with JOY.



The more willing they were to let go of things, the richer the gifts of BEING.



The less they valued life on earth, the more desirable the breakthrough into LIFE seemed to them.

After the visitor had enumerated the qualities that characterized spirit and zeal of these nuns, he concluded: "Although the community still seems to stand on very weak foundations, I am convinced that it will also spread outside the country." First, however, Father Loser had to find a house nearby to relieve the overcrowded founding monastery.

"St. Maria auf der Au" was waiting for its guests, furnished like a monastery, but the clergy knew even better than the sisters that the new government would never tolerate the new settlement. The "foreign nuns" were already a thorn in the side of the authorities in Steinerberg.

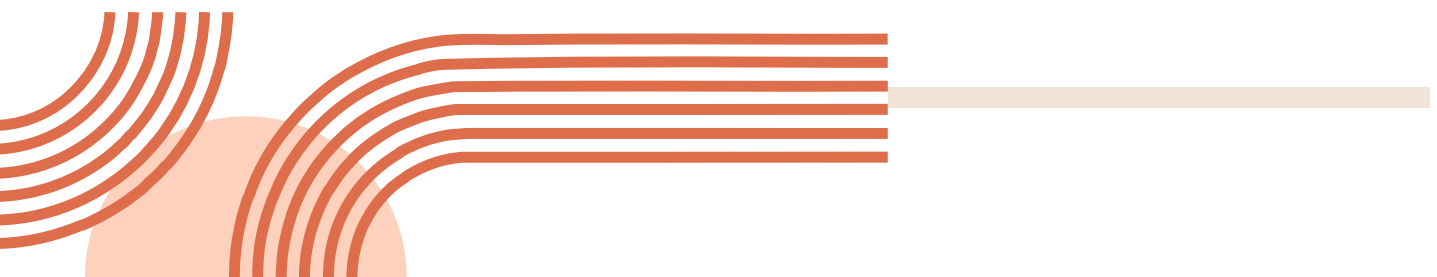
Despite this, Pastor Loser dared to move into the "little old convent" on the Au in Steinen with Mother Theresa and ten other sisters on the anniversary of the foundation. On the same day, the police director of Schwyz appeared and warned the sisters ... to leave Steinen that very evening... Moreover, they had to expect a visit from the state..."

The police search of the house in Steinerberg was not long in coming. Mother Theresa accompanied this "magistrate... with childlike impartiality through all the rooms..." The sisters answered all his questions so openly and naturally that the stern gentleman became increasingly insecure. When he was given

the most beautiful artificial flowers for his wife and colorful socks for his children as a parting gift, he was ashamed of his appearance and left the convent as a convinced friend.

His report to the district council must have read accordingly. The sisters were allowed to stay in Steinerberg and continue to teach school. Their good reputation even reached wider circles. Father Cathani, the Jesuit from the college in Schwyz, had been corresponding with Mother Theresa, and he held her in particularly high esteem.

“It is as if a person filled with the spirit of Jesus and endowed with authority is speaking. She is a saint,” he reported to his friend, Father Loser. What he admired most was her “humility and composure... the strict fasting on bread and water could not be denied to the spiritual mother... but not so easily to the zealous sisters.” He had seen at lunch how strong the desire for imitation was when five of the 13 candidates... had only bread and water in front of them.



# 16 Strong thunderstorms promise fruitful years

This is true in nature as well as in the life of the church. Times of persecution almost force people to anchor themselves more firmly in God: the grain of wheat must die, then it will bear abundant fruit.

The first storm of police intervention was happily weathered, but the dark cloud of deadly disease continued to loom over St. Anne's Convent. The number of Adorers in eternity grew alarmingly fast. Certainly, they longed so much for eternal joy with God that they referred to the pain of the illness as “nothing”.

More sorrow than the death of the sisters was caused to the community by the malicious newspaper writers who spread horror stories about inheritance fraud and poisoning. If they had only seen an Adorer in her death chamber, they would certainly have thrown their sensationalist inventions in the wastepaper basket. Just two examples:

When asked if she would like to die, 23-year-old Walburga from the Black Forest replied: “Oh yes, I would still jump if only I knew where the bridegroom would come from.” Two hours before she died, she called out to Him with her self-written “Bridegroom's Song” and asked the nurse to sing the “Thrice Holy” with her.

When Sr. Lidwina seemed to be out of danger for a few days, the spiritual mother said: “You will have to wait a long time for the bridegroom.” “Yes,” the sick woman replied quietly, “He had to wait a long time for me too.”

Chaplain Holdener, who brought the Eucharistic bread to the sick in the monastery almost every day, wrote in his diary: “When I visited the sick, a little weighed down, I left them relieved...Dying is almost a cheerful event here...”

The women had already practiced hours of walking and days of fasting at home in preparation for communion. The ridicule and persecution they reaped for this only nourished their love. They now experienced illness as a reward, death as a friend who gave them the key to heaven.

Father Cathani wanted to comfort the sisters during this “hard visitation”, as all the well-meaning people called the death of the sisters. Instead, he felt so comforted as soon as he entered the house that he exclaimed: “I was so full of joy... No one in this world can go further than to die joyfully...”

Although Mother Theresa rejoiced at the joyful suffering and death of her sisters, inwardly she suffered unspeakably: “If I am to be to blame for this illness, how can I answer for it?” As she lamented her distress to her Lord in the tabernacle, she suddenly understood: this was God's answer to her prayer, which she had learned from Brother Klaus:

“My Lord and my God, take from me everything that hinders me from coming to you. My Lord and my God, give me everything that leads me to you. My Lord and my God, take me from me and give me completely to you.”

She was ashamed of her complaint and repeated with Jesus in the Garden of Olives: “Not my will be done, but yours.” Mother Theresa also suffered because she knew that her spiritual father Karl Rolfus was being persecuted, even threatened with death, for founding the monastery and for the many deaths in Steinerberg. When she fell asleep in the morning after a night of weeping, she saw her 10 deceased sisters in a dream. They encouraged her and sang with her a song of praise to the blood of Christ.

The fruit of these storms did not fail to appear. More and more young women asked to be admitted to St. Anne's convent. On the day of Sr. Bernardina's funeral, two "young ladies from Solothurn" came forward who were prepared to pay any price to die so happily. Father Cathani greeted them in future with the words: "Rejoice always." This was both a recognition of the joy prevailing in the monastery and a wish for the future.

The storms raged on. The "dying institution", as Father Cathani had once called the convent of the Adorers, was on everyone's lips. Everyone found a different explanation for the fatal illness that was costing so many victims: poor food, constant praying, the confinement of the house, lack of exercise...

Neither hearty food, nor giving up nightly worship, nor relocation to Steinen and Seelisberg, nor daily outdoor exercise brought any help. Even the medicines had no effect.

Hardly anyone thought about the real reasons. Certainly not the doctors who repeatedly examined the sisters and their way of life on behalf of the government.

Only Dr. Franz Mengis from Willisau LU dared to write down what insight he, as a devout doctor, had come to during his visits: "It seems to me that a higher love is tugging at the lives of these virgins... They are already being transformed here on earth through love and made completely similar to the bleeding Savior... They see the One who stands in our midst..."

# 17 New life blossoms out of death

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Day after day and year after year, people experience this truth in creation. How could it be any different in the lives of people who belong entirely to God, the Creator? New entrants filled the gaps of the “early perfected worshippers”. Even more. Maria Theresa burned with a longing for the “eternal city”, where the Pope watched over the Church as Christ's representative on earth. The spiritual mother also fostered a love of the Church in the sisters. On the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, she invited the sisters to make a pilgrimage “at least in spirit” to the blessed city of Rome with its many shrines. During the Octave - eight days after the feast - they were to pray so that “their affairs - the connection to the Italian foundation - would be promoted in Rome.” The community in Steinerberg “was deeply rooted in the Church and was intimately connected to the center - the Precious Blood family in Rome.” It drew abundantly “from the same stream of life” of the blood of Christ. Mother Theresa spoke very fondly of Rome and was pleased that she could “be closer to Rome” by settling in Uri.

As early as April 1847 - in the midst of the great dying - the parish clergy wrote a detailed letter to their bishop “asking for permission and a brief recommendation to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Precious Blood in Rome for the incorporation of the sisters in question into the congregation there...”. The reason given for the request was “in addition to the request of the sisters themselves... the government's conclusion that the certificate would only be granted to teachers who belonged to an ecclesiastically approved order.”

The bishop gladly gave this permission “because of the rich fruit that the sisters' congregation in question had already brought.”

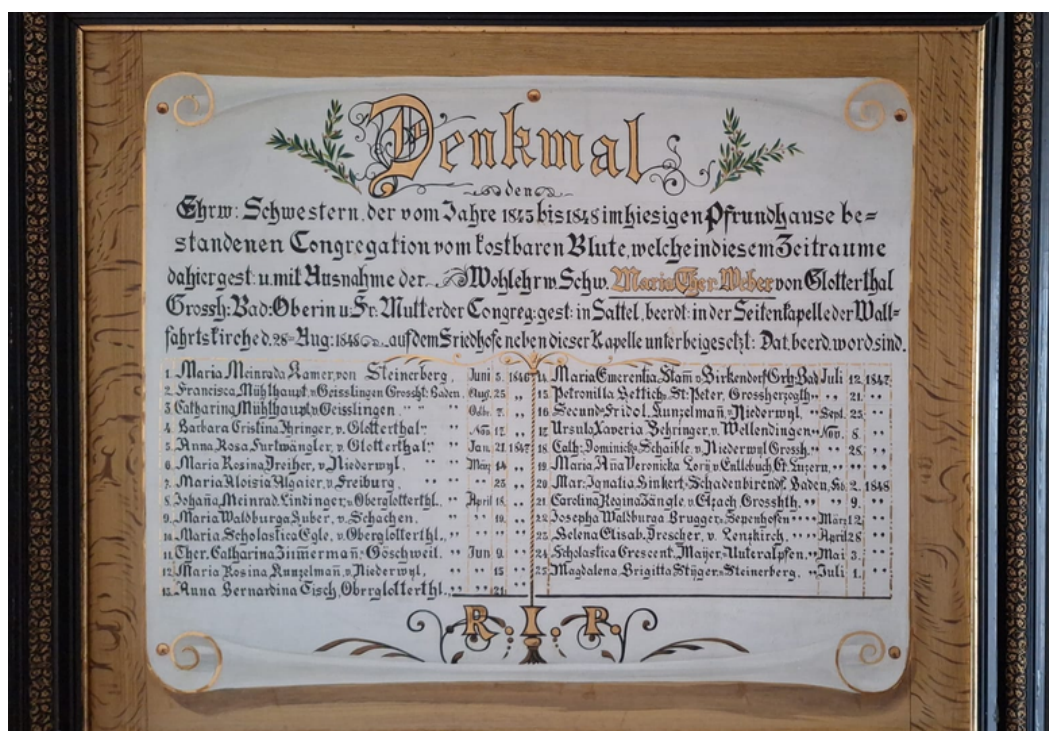
Rolfus sent the bishop's recommendation to the general administration of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Rome.

There was great joy when Father Loser read out the solemn reply in Latin "To the beloved Sisters of St. Anna in Steinerberg".

Johannes Merlini, Maria De Mattias' long-time advisor, wrote on behalf of his Superior General: "...We thank the heavenly gardener for wanting to

fertilize the vineyard watered by his blood with this new addition...We gladly accept all and every single sister, present and future...into our Congregation...You should therefore bear the title of Precious Blood and rejoice in it..." (full text of the document on page...)

It was a pity that Merlini could not see how happy the Adorers were about his letter.



Names of the ASC buried in Steinerberg

# 18 “Mary of Victory” in Seelisberg

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Even before this long-awaited reply from Rome arrived, Anna Maria Zwyszig from Seelisberg asked to be admitted to St. Anne's Convent. Seelisberg was already considered a popular climatic health resort at the time. As the new candidate and her brother were heiresses to a farm, Father Loser enquired as to whether there might not be some Adorers living and recuperating there. The candidate and the pastor of Seelisberg welcomed this idea.

Without waiting for a firm agreement, Father Loser walked with Mother Theresa and five other sisters from Seewen to Brunnen. After crossing Lake Lucerne, the group bravely climbed uphill and stood in front of the rectory in Seelisberg in the evening. No room! Pastor Furrer had “high spa guests”. While Pastor Loser stubbornly searched for accommodations for the night, the sisters prayed confidently. God had often put them to the test, but had never let them down... Against all expectations, the chaplain's housekeeper happily welcomed those seeking shelter. The chaplain was also happy to see the guests when he came home.

The “high spa guests” in the vicarage soon proved to be a gift of divine providence. As soon as they heard the request of “the Institute of the Precious Blood”, one of the gentlemen lent his name as the buyer of the house, as “foreigners from the canton of Uri” could hardly acquire property. The two siblings who owned the estate were “more than happy” with this. The brother wanted to continue managing the property as the sisters' caretaker. The house offered space for 20 sisters. But would the municipality grant them the right to settle? The local priest had serious reservations. He knew how “jealously” his Seelisbergers watched over their “land rights”.

Rolfus traveled to Altdorf, wrote letters to ecclesiastical and secular authorities “and found a favourable reception everywhere”. But the majority of the Seelisberg church council decided to “send the sisters away”.

The parish had the final say. The pastor advised “to tolerate these sisters... for one year”. - “They should stay,” the farmers suddenly shouted. “We'll take them in for a year, and when the year is up, it's forever.” No one understood how this decision could have come about. Only the six Adorers who prayed to heaven in the church, no doubt supported by their fellow sisters in Steinerberg, knew to whom they owed this victory.

Everyone rejoiced at the name of the new convent: “Maria zum Sieg”. In this second home, the sisters wanted to “recuperate and pray for blessings for the municipality”.

The Seelisbergers soon felt the blessing: the sisters held school for the girls, generously cared for the poor, and every hour an Adorer knelt in front of the tabernacle on behalf of everyone.

# 19 Someone has to pay the price

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Not all the young women who applied for admission to Steinerberg 'fit in' with the St. Anna sisters". When some women from the Black Forest were dismissed "for lack of a vocation" They "spread all kinds of unfavorable rumors. The enemies of Rolfus and his foundation liked the gossip. They unleashed a new storm of persecution.

Mother Theresia, who was ill in Seelisberg, "saw" this storm coming and was allowed to prepare the defense in a humanly inexplicable way. Eye and ear witnesses report on this: Pastor Fink of Niederwil am Rhein, a recognized scholar of the time, was Rolfus' superior. He appreciated the zeal of his chaplain and gave him a free hand. On July 27, 1847, Pastor Fink felt "a sense of well-being and comfort" and visibly experienced the "mild radiance" of a woman who quietly but audibly pleaded: "Come to us, we need you." He immediately thought of Mother Theresa, about whom his chaplain had already told him many things. Nevertheless, he wanted to forget the strange experience. When the "visit" was repeated for the third time within 24 hours with increasing pleas, but always "comforting and benevolent", he decided to travel to Steinerberg. As he couldn't find Mother Theresa there, but really wanted to speak to her, Pastor Loser accompanied him to Seelisberg. It didn't take many words. Father Fink only had to convince himself personally of the spirit and life of the Adorers in Switzerland so that he could defend his chaplain and the young convent from the misinformed bishop and the secular authorities. He did this so courageously and successfully that Rolfus was allowed to return to Niederwil in triumph instead of going to prison. "Maria, you have won", he read in large letters at the richly garlanded entrance to the village.

The people followed him jubilantly into the parish church. Rolfus climbed onto the pulpit, thanked God and the people for the miraculous help and added:

"I fear great honors more than great crosses, because honors are followed by even greater crosses." He was right.

The sisters of Seelisberg hiked the long way to Steinerberg more often than some would have liked in order to enable their sick fellow sisters to stay in the healthy mountain world. The "black-masked angelic figures" caused quite a stir. Some admired them, others observed them suspiciously. "The provincial government itself, without being hostile to them, was in no small embarrassment because of them... Tolerance and decisive action alternated against the 'mysterious institution at Steinerberg'", as newspapers spoke of the convent.

The second "occupation" of the "Maria, Our Help" convent near Steinen after almost exactly a year brought the sisters no less suffering than the first time. Once again, the police appeared and demanded immediate eviction. Due to negotiations and torrential rain, the Adorers were allowed to spend the night there after all. The spiritual mother fell seriously ill. The "humane" government allowed her to stay in the convent with two nurses until she was able to return home. Thus "the Lord had given her three houses

during her lifetime, although under painful circumstances". She said: "At St. Anne's we were born in Christ; at Maria, our Lady of Victory, the Lord comforted us; at Maria Our Help, he wants to prepare us for the crossing."

What did Mother Theresa mean by the "crossing"? Her own imminent death, the death of her young sisters or the expulsion of the Adorers from their "spiritual home"?

The certificate of membership of a religious order recognized by the church gave hope that the "teaching certificate" and residence permit would be granted. The Bishop of Chur promised in writing: "I will never leave these dear sisters."

Cardinal Fransoni called the Sisters "an excellent adornment of the Catholic Church" in confirmation of the Adorers in Steinerberg being accepted into the Precious Blood Congregation in Rome. Could they have wished for more? Of course, they didn't just want to be "ornaments", but rather channels of grace and blessing, of reconciliation and salvation for all people for whom Jesus shed his blood. They felt I

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like veins through which Christ's blood flowed into his body, the Church, nourishing, cleansing and healing it. This most honorable service seemed to them worth every sacrifice...

There was certainly no lack of sacrifices in their third year of existence:

The school board declared that "the Steinerberg institution was an obstacle to the existing school regulations" because it did not comply with the law. The hope of remaining in the canton of Schwyz was almost dashed. The spiritual mother seemed close to death.

The Sonderbund War brought with it the border blockade, and Rolfus was unable to support the sisters either spiritually or materially.

The Adorers no longer had to fast, they suffered from hunger because there was not even enough money for bread. But "...the sisters always remained cheerful", Mother Theresa confessed to a priest.

The Sonderbund War did bring one good thing. When the Catholic cantons were surrounded by armed troops, they no longer thought of expelling the Adorers. Many soldiers, including captains and policemen, knocked on the convent door and asked for prayers. They particularly appreciated Mother Theresa's blessing when they had to go to the front.

The war had cost few lives, but the threat of occupation by the victors spread much fear. Pastor Loser advised the sisters to take off their habit and hide in private houses. The good families of Steinerberg were happy to lend them clothes and shelter until the immediate danger had passed. Then they all gathered again in the convent, where two seriously ill people had stayed with their keeper.

The austere and joyful life in community continued during a few quieter weeks before the next big storm.

The "non-cantonal" authorities, who now set the tone in Schwyz, showed an unusual interest in the Sisters in St. Anna's convent. One investigation followed another. The newspapers never tired of reporting on this "dying institution".

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The new government could not leave these women alone “for humanitarian reasons”.

When the new Jesuit college in Schwyz was devastated “and the good Fathers barely escaped with their lives”, Mother Theresa knew that they would not be spared either. To the “cries of victory from the heroes of the day: ‘those who support the Jesuits should be chased out of the country’,” Mother Theresa replied in tears: “Whatever happens, God's blessing will rest on Steinerberg.”

At this time, the Adorers of St. Anna were “almost world-famous... The newspapers had born their fruit. No other convent was talked about as much as the sisters in Steinerberg. Because “the investigations revealed that they were certainly affiliated with or friends of the Jesuits...”, they had to leave Switzerland.

The expulsion document appeared in the newspaper. On the same day (June 3, 1848), the sisters also received it in person. The population was shocked. The municipal council of Steinerberg met and “testified: The sisters have never been a burden to the community, but...have been charitable...and we propose...further acceptance of the sisters.” It was for nothing!

The expulsion of the Adorers had already been decided in December 1847, but the authorities would have preferred the sisters to leave Switzerland voluntarily. They did not do so because the people, the priests and the bishop encouraged them to stay. The suffering did not frighten them, they knew in whom they believed. We learn how much the Bishop of Chur appreciated this young foundation from his handwritten letter to the Landammann N. von Reding: “Since the congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood there...is so close to my heart because of its useful instruction of the female youth and its excellent piety, I would like to preserve it for the general benefit...of the people of the Canton of Schwyz.”

Rolfus was in Steinerberg when the sisters received the written expulsion order. All but a few terminally ill sisters and their nurses had to leave Steinerberg within eight days. The doctor in charge decided that five sisters, including Mother Theresia Weber, and two nurses could stay.

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# 20 Ready for transplantation

Saying goodbye to Steinerberg was very difficult for everyone, but the separation from their spiritual mother, whom they would probably never see again, was even more difficult. Stronger than the pain, however, was their faith in God's providence. "...all immediately joined in singing the Ambrosian hymn of praise, the Te Deum, in thanksgiving for this blessing from God, that he honors us to be able to endure something out of love for Jesus."

The Adorers of the Blood of Christ left their spiritual home in several groups. They traveled partly on foot, partly on a wagon, by train and by ship. Although they wore secular clothes, the people recognized them as nuns and helped them with advice and assistance. The Benedictine nuns at Fahr Abbey near Zurich gave them a particularly warm welcome. They were allowed to rest there for days and gather new strength.

The sisters of Seelisberg voluntarily followed their fellow sisters into exile. As they passed through, they greeted their foundress in Steinerberg for the last time.

Despite her mortal weakness, Mother Theresa encouraged everyone, put everything in order, paid all the debts and bade farewell to the last sisters who were able to travel. But then she felt so homesick for her community that she too wanted to leave the empty convent and follow the others. The good people of Steinerberg carried the sick woman in a stretcher to Steinen. There they placed her in a wagon. After three agonizing hours, the train reached the village of Sattel, only five kilometers away. Father Märchi took the dying mother Theresia and her two nurses, Sister Cölestina and Sister Verena, into his house. The other sisters traveled on.

After another four days, Maria Theresa was at the end of her energy. She was only 26 years old. The priests of Steinerberg wanted to bring her back to the place of foundation. A solemn peal of bells greeted the dead foundress of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. The population kept vigil day and night, praying, and on August 30 she was buried "at the entrance to the church with her head facing the high altar."

Mother Theresa was "regarded as a saint by all who knew her, 'a true bride of Christ, a martyr of love, the most beautiful adornment of the little country of Schwyz.

Chaplain Holdener, who had experienced the founding of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ from close with the greatest personal involvement, wrote: "The history of this congregation over three years is extremely strange! Small the beginning, rapid the growth, great the mortality...so young the first superior, and already in the call of holiness; a child, and yet so wise and punctual in governing; the children, worthy of the mother, joyful and God-loving in life, devoted and joyful in death! What a congregation, which the good Shepherd loves and protects, which all good-minded

people in the spiritual and secular classes admire, but which is unbelievably hated and slandered in and outside Switzerland. Is such an assembly not God's work and planting?"

The people of Steinerberg mourned the loss of their sisters: above all, they missed their perpetual prayer. They decided to continue it. "What comforts me most," wrote Father Loser to the bishop," is that 24 older and younger virgins came forward in the small village, even servants, who wanted to continue the perpetual adoration day and night in the houses."

The artist Deschwanden rightly testifies: "The Sisters of the Precious Blood blessed Steinerberg with their lasting example of piety, self-denial and charity. While many triumphantly blaspheme and send curses after the sisters, the divine sower watches over the scattered seeds to make them grow more gloriously on the eternal Easter morning, when we will then understand the workings of divine providence."

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The Bishop of Chur responded “with painful compassion” to the report “about the sending away of the brides of Christ so heroically devoted to God”. The thought comforted him, he wrote, “that after the demolition there has often been a time of reconstruction... Where the altar of the church is no longer possible, the altar of the heart is sufficient, which no one can overthrow...” The bishop then adds: “Nurture the generous decision of your parishioners - to continue perpetual adoration - as best you can, for great will be the blessing.”

This “magnanimous decision” by the Steinerberg women encouraged Rolfus to recruit other worldly people for perpetual adoration. He had an adoration booklet printed in Einsiedeln, which provided for as many “weekly associations” as “the church year has weeks”. Each association was to have as many members as the “week counts hours”. This plan, which was probably born in the heart of God, was so well received by the believers at the time that within a year, “around 30,000 members from Switzerland, Baden and the rest of Germany” were accepted.

Rolfus, who was aware of the political and religious situation in Switzerland, had looked for a place of refuge for his Sisters months before they were expelled and found one in the French Alsace, where people still spoke German at the time. The priest and the people of Ottmarsheim welcomed the Adorers with joy. They admired these quiet, unassuming women. Was it the adoration from five o'clock in the morning until the evening peal that brought so much radiant joy to their young faces - in the midst of hardship?

The women of the surrounding area listened to the sisters praying aloud in the parish church. After a few years, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ were allowed to move into the empty, half-ruined Benedictine convent, which the parish had furnished in a makeshift manner. They received the rules of the Adorers in Italy and took on new works. In 1857, a group was able to return to their home in Baden to run a “rescue home” for neglected girls in Gurtweil near Waldshut. Gurtweil soon became the blessed “cradle” of apostolic Adorers.

Sister Klementina Zerr traveled to Italy with Sister Paulina Feser to get to know the foundress, Maria De Mattias, and the spirit of her sisters. The two of them also learned the Italian language, which facilitated lively correspondence in the future.

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# Those with firm roots 21 can spread their wings wide

The firm bond with Rome was established, the apostolic orientation secured. During Maria De Mattias' lifetime, her spiritual director, Johannes Merlini, had visited the community in Gurtweil. He was the general moderator of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and thus the “ecclesiastical superior” of the Adorers. Year after year, around ten young women received the religious habit in Gurtweil, obtained their teacher's diploma, enthusiastically taught young girls and prepared them for life as Christian women.

Even Protestant villages in Baden applied for sisters from Gurtweil for their girls' schools: Gengenbach, Donaueschingen, Krozingen, Lörrach, Burkheim, Singen. When the Kulturkampf banned all educational work by Catholic nuns and ordered the dissolution of the community in Gurtweil, most of the nuns emigrated to the USA. There, under pressure from the bishop, they became a diocesan congregation and called themselves the “Adorers of the Precious Blood of O'Fallon”.

The novices and very few professed sisters under the direction of Sr. Klementina Zerr, who had personally known the foundress, Maria De Mattias, wanted to remain connected to Rome at all costs. They found a new home in the remote, tiny village of Ruma Illinois. The group grew rapidly and “conquered” school teaching and nursing in the Midwest. Their daughter province in Wichita, Kansas, helped the ASC mission in Brazil become an independent province and also established a training center in Korea in the 1970s.

Ruma, Illinois, sent the first ASC missionaries to China in 1933. 40 years later they also went to Bolivia and Liberia. Here the Lord took the first five martyrs in October 1992.

A remaining group of elderly and sickly sisters stayed “nearby”. A widow in Feldkirch took them in until the Trappist Abbot Franz Pfanner from Vorarlberg won them over for an orphanage in Bosnia, which was still very inhospitable at the time. From here, the courageous women, who were joined by many girls from Germany, Austria and soon also from Bosnia, ventured back across the ocean to the eastern USA at the turn of the century.

Others regained a foothold in Austria, Vorarlberg, but were not allowed to found a novitiate due to a “surplus of spiritual vocations”. It was not until 1920, when the “castle” in Balzers, Liechtenstein, became available, that they were able to accept new members and open further communities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

In 1927, exactly 80 years after the Adorers of the Blood of Christ of Steinerberg were admitted to the Precious Blood Family in Rome, the German-speaking ASCs bought the Villa Auf der Maur in Steinerberg. They named the house St. Annaheim, which was only a few meters away from the original convent. After many changes to the building and the apostolic work of the sisters, St. Annaheim offered the elderly a much sought-after home for their retirement.

After the Second World War, Croatian adorers of Polish origin transplanted the veneration of the blood of Christ to Poland. Others followed the Croatian emigrants to Australia in 1963.

“On the way”, the ASCs largely lost the memory of their roots in Steinerberg. It was only the Council's call to all religious to return “to the origin of the individual institutes” and “to investigate in detail the spirit and the actual intentions of the founders and foundresses” that helped the sisters to discover their roots and draw new life from the forgotten sources. They were amazed to discover that they had - unconsciously - passed on the spirit of Steinerberg: love of prayer, willingness to make sacrifices, simplicity and cheerfulness from generation to generation despite all the storms.

The foundress and spiritual mother Maria Theresa and her “holy women of Steinerberg” have certainly interceded for her sisters over the decades and rejoiced, as she did on her 24th birthday when she wrote to the community's sickbed: “I am glad that you love each other so much and are happy.”

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# DECREE OF INCORPORATION

*Blasius Valentini, Moderator General of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood U.H.J.Chr.*

*To the beloved Sisters*

*at St. Anna in Steinerberg, Diocese of Chur*

*God the Father has chosen you from time immemorial and through his Spirit. Grace be yours and peace in abundance.*

*You have joined together to live as religious sisters; you wish to bear the name of the Precious Blood of U.H.J.Chr. and to place yourselves under his protection. In order to serve God and to reach the goal of your vocation, the salvation of souls, more easily, you have unanimously asked in writing again and again that we join and incorporate your family into our Congregation.*

*From the very beginning, we have received these holy and pious wishes with joy. We thank the heavenly gardener for wanting to fertilize the vineyard, which his right hand has planted and his blood has watered, with this new growth. God has done this, and it is wonderful in our eyes: for you, like the sisters of our congregation, want to venerate the blood of Christ day and night in perpetual adoration and, in accordance with the rules, instruct the girls in virtue, science and manual dexterity. In this way you want to form a unity with us. We have considered all this carefully. Your adherence to your plan and the approval of the Bishop of Chur have prompted us to fulfill your wish. After listening to the superiors and counselors of our Congregation, we gladly accept into our Society or Congregation any and all sisters, present and future (if they are accepted according to law and custom), who live in the said house and belong to the religious family. We incorporate them and want to consider them as accepted members. You may and should therefore bear the title of the Precious Blood and rejoice in it. We receive you and unite you to us by the same bond by which other sisters who call themselves Adorers in Italy, Switzerland and the Diocese of Cincinnati, America, are united to our Congregation. In the same way we incorporate you and declare you as belonging to us.*

*Beniamino Romani*

*By this document, therefore, signed by us and bearing the seal of our Congregation, all that has been said so far is confirmed and legally valid. The superior or mother of the house and the community also has the right to admit other sisters during her term of office. However, she must always comply with all the regulations of the local bishop and exercise his powers accordingly.*

*For the rest, we exhort and implore you to live a life worthy of the call that was given to you. "Be humble, peaceable, patient, bearing with one another in love, striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the peace that binds you together" (Ephesians 4:2)*

*In this way, set an example of good works. Then the adversary will flee from you, because he can say nothing evil against you. Rather, let the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised in everything. He has loved us and washed us in his blood.*

*Given in Rome, in the house of the Congregation of the Precious Blood. By the Redeemer in the Field, August 13, 1847*

*For the Moderator General*

*Johannes Merlini*



The drawings are by Sr. Regina  
Hassler, ASC.

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# About the Author

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Sr. Alma Pia Spieler, ASC, born in Slovenia, taught for many years at the convent school in Schaan after completing her studies in Fribourg (Switzerland).

As a General Councilor in Rome, she got to know all the Adorers of the Blood of Christ – ASC – on all continents. In 1984, she translated the history of the ASC Congregation, then wrote the history of the Schaan Province, which was published in 1919 under the title “When the Grain of Wheat Dies.”

“Don't Forget Your Roots” is the commemorative publication for the 150th anniversary of the founding of the German-speaking ASC in Steinerberg (1845-1995).

