The Evolving Missiology of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the ways in which the missiology of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary has evolved from its beginning, and how it has expanded its self-understanding following the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council, and the further evolution following subsequent events of the new millennium.

During her time as the spiritual guide of her Institute, the foundress, Helene de Chappotin, repeated time and again her cry to God: “Where are you leading me?” Taking up this prayer, this thesis will use the same question as the springboard to discover how the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary have evolved and are still evolving.

While there was little change in the missiology of the Institute until the Second Vatican Council, the Sisters continued their Foundress’ charism by following her example and studying her writings. In this way they continued to evolve their Missiology according to the signs of the times and the situations in which they encountered others.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma in any university or other Institutions, and affirm that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Heather Weedon
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EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The word ‘Charism’ is understood in this paper as the “Gifts or graces given by God to persons for the good of others and the Church.”¹

‘Institutes’ refer to orders, congregations, institutions and associations which work in the missions.² The 1983 Code of Canon Law describes a Religious Institute as "a society in which members, according to proper law, pronounce public vows, either perpetual or temporary which are to be renewed, however, when the period of time has elapsed, and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common."³ However, a previous definition for missionaries is given in the Vatican Council II document, Ad Gentes: "‘Institutes’ refer to orders, congregations, institutions and associations which work in the missions.”⁴

‘Missions, “...is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ.” This definition is taken from the Vatican II document, Ad Gentes, #6.

A General Chapter, “which holds supreme authority in the institute according to the norm of the constitutions, is to be composed in such a way that, representing the entire institute, it becomes a true sign of its unity in charity …” (Canon 631 §1). “…also, any member can freely send wishes and suggestions to a general chapter” (Canon 631 §3).⁵ A General Chapter is held every six years.

A General Congregation is a meeting of the Superior General, the General Councillors and the Provincials from around the world. It is held every three years, between General Chapters.

⁴ Vatican Council II document, Ad Gentes, #23, Footnote 2.
Evolution “is a process marked by novelty, creativity, and future; new entities rise up out of the old…it is the power of attraction towards what lies ahead.” The word ‘evolution’ means “to unfold or open out, derives from the Latin evolvere.”

The idea that life unfolds from simple to complex structures or that nature is marked by a twofold movement of convergence and divergence now holds true not only on the level of biology but on just about every level of life in the universe.

Evolution does not happen smoothly, but rather erratically; for example, the sudden disappearance of the dinosaurs. This understanding of the term ‘evolution’ is reflected in the sporadic changes within the missiology of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

The word Missiology (missio logos) is used in this thesis to mean the theological study of mission, especially the character and purpose of missionary work. It is the theory and praxis of the missionary endeavours, in this thesis, within the Catholic Church. The website of the Australian Association for Mission Studies explains it as follows:

Missiology is the study of mission. A plainer term for it is “mission studies”. It uses all the disciplines of theology (such as biblical studies, history and systematic theology) as well as the social sciences (such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics and economics). Missiology is mission in its more reflective mode, although the two terms overlap a great deal.

Missiologist Cathy Ross states that “…missiology calls not only for study, research and reflection but also for self-evaluation and engagement. It needs to be self-critical and light on its feet so that change can be embraced and effected.” This thesis will take these suggestions into consideration.

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, Professor of Missiology, Pontifical Urban University, Rome, in “Missiology in its Relation to Intercultural Theology and Religious Studies,” Sedos Bulletin, 47/11-12, 2015, 244.
The words, “the Sisters” will be used, following the first reference, to refer to the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in order to minimise repetition. When mention is made of religious women of another Congregation or Order, their title will be given.

The term “Apostolic Vicar” refers to the priest in charge of the area which is under Propaganda Fide, a Vatican department, and is not a diocese.

The word “Universal” is used to express the world-wide outreach of the Institute; it is not limited to one nationality or continent.

Methodology

A missionary Institute such as the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary requires a broad, inclusive praxis, based on the multicultural and multifaith contexts in which their communities live throughout the world. Their aim is the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ, that is, the love of God for every person. The writings of the Foundress and written works about her life and faith experiences are foundational texts. Following the beatification of the Foundress, the documents from this process became available in 2013 and have been used extensively. Whilst Helene did not use these terms, her method of discernment was similar to that of Cardinal Cardijn. The Sisters continue to utilise Cardinal Cardijn’s See-Judge-Act method of discernment in all their meetings.

Originality of the Thesis

In their publications\(^\text{12}\) the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary have focused mainly on their Foundress and her spirituality, and various Sisters who have lived an exemplary missionary life; for instance, the seven martyrs of China. “This thesis will be of value to the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary as it traces the evolution of their missiology. It will also show Helene de Chappotin’s uniqueness as the first Catholic woman to found her own missionary Institute, welcoming women of all nationalities and going beyond national boundaries to proclaim the love of God to everyone.

\(^{12}\) A list of these publications is available on their website: www.fmm.org
This thesis will also be helpful to other women missionaries as it provides examples of how women can effectively minister – without the aim of changing the religion of the ‘other.’ Rather, it is to promote the knowledge of the oneness of the whole human race as all are sister/brother. Through respecting and collaborating with other religions one can work towards the acknowledgement of ‘One God, One Human Race, one world’.”
INTRODUCTION

The foundress of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary was Helene Marie Philippine de Chappotin de Neuville. Helene was born in Nantes, France, in 1839 and died at San Remo, Italy in 1904.

In order to trace the evolution of the missiology of Helene de Chappotin it is necessary to look at her upbringing. The spirituality, theologies and missionary endeavours of her day had an influence upon her and subsequently upon the Sisters who followed her.

This thesis will highlight the missiology of the Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Helene de Chappotin, how it evolved during her lifetime, and its development over the years. It will then be possible to see what has been retained of her missiology and what was adapted of her unique vision as a response to the signs of the times.

The first chapter is a historical study of the influences on Helene’s early life which shaped her faith. Within this initial chapter the religious, the social and the political situations of France in the nineteenth century will be examined as these areas had a formative influence upon Helene. Political struggles and their wars for independence from the various colonial powers would necessarily have required changes in the needs of peoples; therefore, these will also be examined.

The second chapter covers the beginnings of Helene’s religious vocation, and the influence on her spirituality of the two Congregations she joined before beginning her own, the Poor Clare Sisters and the Society of Marie Reparatrice. This paper will outline her experiences within these communities, and how they influenced the Constitutions of her own Institute. The reason for the difficulties which led Helene and twenty other Sisters to separate from the Society of Marie Reparatrice are outlined.

Chapter Three covers the beginning of the new Institute in 1877, the struggles endured to establish it, and the changes which occurred over the subsequent years. It includes Helene’s unique understanding of missionary service: that this new Institute would be universal, having no frontiers or a specific ministry, and consist of communities which were international. This deliberate mixing of nationalities of the Sisters within each community was Helene’s way of
expressing the universality of the Christian message. The initial ‘Plan’ for the new Institute and the subsequent Constitutions are studied. An account of the entry into the Franciscan family by Helene and the Sisters is given in this Chapter.

This chapter will also relate the continued conflict between Helene and her Sisters and the Jesuits and Marie Reparatrice Society following their arrival in Europe.

Helene’s mission theology and spirituality will be the subject of Chapter Four, looking at the ways Helene formed her Sisters. The formative influences comprise her early experiences of religious life as a contemplative Poor Clare, her missionary experience in India, a mostly Hindu nation. Later her numerous journeys within Europe to establish the Institute opened her eyes further to the lack of Christian values and poverty in so many nations.

Chapter Five will show how Helene and the Sisters lived their missionary commitment, from the beginning of the Institute in 1877 until Helene’s death in 1904. The emphasis was on professional formation, languages, health and education.

These five chapters show the Institute as an international, intercultural community up to a point. It was Eurocentric in its manner of life, hierarchical, and the spirituality and the languages were based on European customs.

The findings of the previous chapters will then provide the basis for Chapter Six which looks at the changes which occurred from the death of the Foundress until the Second Vatican Council. The social situation of the relevant era will be studied to ascertain the influences upon the founding charism and approaches to the missionary work of the Sisters. Political upheavals, wars and struggles for independence by many nations from the various colonial powers brought about changes in the needs of people and hence the response of the Sisters. Therefore, these will also be examined.

The changes suggested by the participants at the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965] is the subject of Chapter Seven. The Council called for the re-evaluation of the life-style of the Sisters and for doing this in the light of the roots of their Institutes. The document suggesting this updating of religious life was *Perfectae Caritatis*. Other documents are studied to ascertain the missiology in those Vatican documents which assisted the Sisters in expanding
their participation in the mission of God (the Missio Dei). These include Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate, and Gaudium et Spes. The Second Vatican Council was a watershed for the Institute, opening the Sisters to new ministries such as Interfaith dialogue.

Chapter Eight looks at the Sisters’ response to the signs of the times in the new millennium. The new reality of the globalisation of economies and cultures. The Sisters’ discernment of this phenomenon will be the basis for their response the changed needs of the Church and the world. This Chapter is based on the question posed by the General Superior in her Report to the General Chapter of 2008, looking ahead to the changes in the understanding of ‘mission’:

For a long time mission was interpreted and lived in geographic terms of ad extra; since Vatican II, it has also been ad gentes and the new paradigm emphasises inter gentes. Faced with these challenges which come to us from the evolution of the world and the new visions in the Church, how can we contribute to a renewal of the missionary sense in fidelity to our charism?\(^\text{13}\)

In the light of the original Charism of the Institute, the understanding of mission today, and how the self-understanding of the Institute was revised in order to remain true to its initial founding spirit is outlined, while at the same time proclaiming the gospel message in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER ONE

Formative Influences during Helene’s Childhood

Overview

By taking a look at Helene’s childhood and upbringing, it is possible to obtain a glimpse into the basis for her firm foundation in the Catholic faith and her missionary vocation. Her encounters with the poor and with missionaries as a child were the beginnings of the missiology she would later develop for the Institute she was to establish.

The home in which Helene was reared was staunchly Catholic, loyal to the Pope and to the French Monarchy. Thus, the Papacy and the French political situations influenced Helene’s family and hence herself.

The family was quite wealthy, having properties on the Caribbean islands of Santo Domingo (today known as Haiti), and in Cuba. Both these properties were very profitable due to the use of African slaves.¹⁴

Helene’s Early Years

Helene’s years in the home laid the foundation for a life dedicated to God. The experiences of God’s presence and action in her life as a child had a lasting influence upon her.

Helene, the youngest of five children, was born in 1839 in Nantes, Brittany, in north-western France. She had two sisters and two brothers, although two other children had died within a year of their birth and prior to Helene’s birth.¹⁵ Her mother, Sophie Galbaud de Fort, was born in Nantes, and her father, Charles de Chappotin, from a Breton aristocratic family, was

¹⁴ See details below, “Wealth gained through Slavery.”
born in Cuba. The paternal side of the family was quite well-to-do, owning land in Cuba and making their fortune from their sugar plantation there.\textsuperscript{16}

Helene’s maternal grandfather was a Breton nobleman, Pierre Alphonse Galbaud du Fort. After having fought against the French Revolutionaries, du Fort was forced to seek refuge in Germany in 1791. He then took part in the fighting of 1792 in France, and in gratitude for his services and bravery was made a Lieutenant Colonel by the future King Louis XVIII, and later, made a councillor of a Prefecture.\textsuperscript{17} Helene’s maternal grandmother, Catherine Martine Rose de Berindoague, of Basque origin, was born on the island of Santo Domingo. Helene’s mother, Sophie, was the youngest of their four children.\textsuperscript{18}

Helene also had Spanish blood in her veins through her paternal great grandfather, Jean Baptiste Chappotin, who had settled on Santo Domingo in 1721. Jean Baptiste married a Creole woman there, Marie Bouchet, and they had eleven children. The eldest son Denis married Marie-Francoise de Guzman de Santo-Domingo, one of St Dominic Guzman’s descendants. This is why Helene often mentioned her link to this family and her Spanish heritage by referring to St Dominic as ‘uncle’.\textsuperscript{19}

Jean Baptiste Chappotin owned a plantation on Santo Domingo.\textsuperscript{20} Plantations were plentiful on the island and, through the export of fruit and other produce which were quite rare in Europe, the plantation owners became quite wealthy. However, their prosperity was dependent on a large workforce - black African slaves. This family also possessed a plantation in Cuba, where Helene’s father Charles was born in 1799.\textsuperscript{21}

Helene’s family home was in Nantes, a port city in Brittany. Brittany was a large province in the north west of France, founded in the fifth century by Celts. It had become a possession of the English from 1429 until 1532 when it was conquered by the French. Brittany had retained

\textsuperscript{17} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Very Reverend Mother Mary of the Passion. Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary}. (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1994), 2. Henceforth this book will be referred to as ‘Mary of the Passion.’
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 3.
its own parliament until the French Revolution when it was eventually incorporated into the Republic. Thus, Brittany had a history of invasions and thus various impacts on the culture.

An old Duke’s hunting lodge was co-owned by Helene’s mother and her mother’s brother and called the ‘Fort’. Helene’s uncle was married with six children and the two families shared this large dwelling. The children were educated at home by one of their aunts, Aurelie Galbaud, a Breton and a supporter of the cause of King Henry V (1820-1883). This King strongly supported the Catholic Church in France which resulted in a strong reaction against the Church:

Growing discontent with respect to the influence of the Catholic Church in education and politics led to a series of reforms during the Third Republic reducing this influence, under the protests of the Ultramontanists who supported the Vatican's influence. Anti-clericalism was popular among Republicans, Radicals and Socialists, in part because the Church had supported the Counterrevolutionaries throughout the 19th century.23

Growing up in this French royalist family which mourned the exile of King Henry V, Helene was regaled with stories of wars and chivalry. Helene’s deep attachment to the monarchy was imbued in her from her earliest years. She thus longed for the return of Henry V, as she herself shared: “I floated little notes down the river with the words: ‘Go and find Henry V!’”24 As a child Helene had once expressed her loyalty to the king in her desire “to be the Joan of Arc of Henry V!”25

The two families were dedicated Catholics and had relatives who had fought and died defending the Papal States during the 1789 French Revolution.26

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24 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 10.
25 Ibid., 9.
**Helene’s Spiritual Formation**

While Helene and her sisters and female cousins received their religious and formal education in the home, the boys went to colleges when old enough. The spiritual devotions of those days left their indelible mark on Helene. She preserved many of the devotional practices of her time, and introduced them into her new Institute; for instance, the importance of the Trinity, Eucharistic Adoration, and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to Mary of Nazareth. Her concern for the poor was instilled in her during this time, and the spirituality that revolved around Eucharistic devotion would be important characteristics of her new Institute.

However, Helene recounted that her religious education as a child was not always welcome: “The God about whom they taught me about, the God of the law, frightened me and I was not able to understand anything. Vocal prayers bored me to death.”

Although she stated that this God frightened her, Helene shared in her memoirs a memory she had as a three-year-old: “And yet even in my small bed these abstract mysteries occupied my mind.”

From an early age Helene had a passion for reading, and besides the usual subject of literacy, she was also educated in botany, the arts, music and painting at home. There was a very extensive library in the home, and most evenings were spent by the two families in group reading and sharing together. Despite the wide variety of topics in this library, there were no books on St Francis and his Order. Yet it is known that Helene had later read the life of St Francis.

Helene’s father had been sent from Cuba to study in the United States as a young man and the family library at the Fort reflected his broad interests:

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28 Ibid., 7.
29 Ibid., 40.
A rich library offered serious readings with great cultural value. Conserved intact still today are 1124 volumes from second half of 16th century - more than 200 books on religion, demonstrated the strong Christian orientation of the family. There were also numerous literary works among which were important collections of best classic authors in French, Greek, Latin, English, Italian in their original translation. There were also historical books: between 28 volumes Roman history; books on the history of France, of America, England, Sweden and Portugal. There were books on Natural history, law, diplomatic corps, education, the arts, journeys ... when visitors came who were versed in science, history, and engineering she was able to converse engagingly with them….  

Besides the books mentioned above, there was also those on the life of Don Masillo, an Italian artist, a history of the Trappists, volumes on the lives of the Martyrs, and Le Génie du Christianisme, by Francois-Auguste Chateaubriand. This latter book, written in 1802, was very popular. Even Napoleon is reported to have been impressed by it: “it... won favour both with the Royalists and with Napoleon Bonapart, who was just then concluding a concordat with the papacy and restoring Roman Catholicism as the state religion in France.” A further observation on the book was made by the historian, James McMillan: “This did more than any other single work to restore the credibility and prestige of Christianity in intellectual circles...” An indication of this book’s popularity was that it had been translated into nine languages. Speaking of the effect of Chateaubriand’s words on her, a woman “of the early nineteenth century stated... ‘He plays the harpsichord on all my heartstrings’.”

Chateaubriand was of the opinion that “occidental culture requires the church as a bulwark against barbarism.” When stationed in Rome as French Ambassador Chateaubriand wrote

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34 Tommaso Realfonso, known as ‘Masillo’ [1677 to 1743]. Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 40.
35 Francois-Auguste Chateaubriand, Genie du Christianisme ou Beautes de la Religion Chretienne. (Lyon, France: Ballanche père et fils, Sixieme edition, 1889). (There are five copies of this book in the Sisters’ library in their motherhouse in Rome).
38 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, The Century of Mary of the Passion, (Studium des Chatelets, France: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1984), 75.
Les Martyrs, which was said to be “partly Chateaubriand’s own confession and partly an attack on Napoleon. But its general design - the clash between dying paganism and nascent Christianity - is an illustration of the thesis of the Genie du Christianisme.” Chateaubriand’s writings reflected the widespread opinion of the day of the necessity of the Catholic faith to safeguard common decency and morality. He is also said to have had a major influence on the surge in missionary vocations during the nineteenth century, particularly in France, when he advocated “generosity and the adventure of faraway lands.”

As missiologist Stephen Bevans explains:

For Catholics, a renewed missionary spirit can be traced back to the second decade of the 19th century, when Europe had regained some semblance of order after the terror of the French Revolution and the final defeat of Napoleon, and when the church began to find new vigor as it experienced a virtual explosion of religious and missionary communities of both women and men.

Other books in the family library were copies of the recently translated works of the Italian priest, Alphonsus de Liguori (1696-1787) on moral theology. These volumes were considered very important religious works, for “his thought (was) much more accessible to the generality of Christians.” Other works of Liguori which were very popular and reflected his spirituality of “total confidence in God’s mercy and heartfelt devotion to the Virgin and the Eucharist...” These devotions, Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Glories of Mary espoused by Liguori were later included by Helene in the spiritual practices in the Institute she was to establish.

Among other authors of the spiritual books in the family library at Le Fort, which were also influential in the nineteenth century, were those by Jean-Nicholas Grou (1731-1803) whose works were reprinted frequently; for example, his work of 1788, Characteristics of True

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42 Moreau, ‘Francois Rene de Chateaubriand,’ 448.
45 L Vereecke, “St Alphonsus Liguori,” New Catholic Encyclopedia, (2003) Vol. 1, 310. Liguori was canonised the year Helene was born (1839) He founded the Redemptorist Order and was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1871.
47 Ibid.
Devotion had forty-two reprints up to 1866, and his 1796 Meditations in the form of a retreat on the love of God, had twenty-four reprints. These works show their influence upon Helene through her emphasis on these devotions and on the love of God.

There were several books being promoted in the early nineteenth century which went against the common practice of the day and advocated the education of women. Jennifer Popiel, in her work, The Hearth, the Cloister, and Beyond: Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Woman, writes of the French author Louis-Aimé Martin who in 1834 wrote a book on the importance of educating women, Education of Mothers: or the Civilization of Mankind by Women:

(Martin)...argued that domestic education was the key to changing the world. The book enjoyed multiple French editions, both expensive and cheap, between 1834 and 1883. It was also translated into English and again went through many editions (more than twenty in the United States alone), though its popularity in the Anglophone world appears to have peaked before 1870. The publication numbers and the longevity of the work indicate that Martin was speaking to an already-receptive audience and had a wide popular appeal.

Later, when exposed to the disturbing situation of other women in various parts of France and the world, Helene worked tirelessly to see to the education and care of women and children.

Helene’s shared life with her siblings and cousins continued until she was eight years of age, when her father’s duties required the family’s relocation to another township, Vannes. Because of this move Helene lost her cousin playmates. As Helen’s siblings were much older than her, she turned to reading to distract herself from her loss. Helene wrote: “It was now that there began for me perhaps the greatest passion of my life, that of reading.”

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49 Cf. Chapter Four, Missionary Spirituality.
52 Cf. Chapter Two, Helene’s time as a Reparatrice Sister in India, and Chapter Four, Mission Theology.
53 Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 11.
As a young child Helene’s mother taught her to be concerned for the poor by frequently giving gifts and donations to the needy. One memory Helene recounted was how her mother used Helene’s sympathy for the poor to help her overcome her fear of the dark. Telling Helene that if she would leave the night light off when she went to bed that night, her mother “would give her a voucher for a loaf of bread to give to the poor.”\textsuperscript{54} Despite her terror, Helene managed to see the night through without a light and gained a gift for the hungry.\textsuperscript{55}

Helene’s concern for the poor showed itself while still a young child. Helene, along with some of her friends, dressed up as beggars and begged money for the poor. When they were found out by Helene’s mother and told that they were deceiving people, Helene suggested they begin a group to collect clothing for the poor. Helene called it ‘St Anne’s Association’, and even arranged for a president, secretary and treasurer to be designated. As Helene herself reflected much later, “it lasted for two or three years and we really did a lot of good.”\textsuperscript{56}

A very devout child, Helene, guided by her mother, regularly read the gospels. In the family chapel morning and evening prayer and daily Mass were held.\textsuperscript{57} The local bishop authorised the setting up of the Way of the Cross at the family Chapel on the property, which then became the site for processions each year.\textsuperscript{58}

From her early years Helene showed that she was quite a reflective and deep thinker. She recounts her feelings one day as she was playing with her doll:

\begin{quotation}
I was very small. Suddenly I thought I was making too much of this dead thing, this cardboard which could not love me at all, and I threw it away. I understood that to love and be loved perfectly must be joy, and unfeeling dolls no longer amused me.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quotation}

Even as a child Helene demonstrated her sense of the importance of a solid education in the faith. A woman who knew Helene when they were both children reported that Helene taught

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 37.
\textsuperscript{59} Helene de Chappotin quoted in Mother D’Arc’s, Life of Mother Mary of the Passion, Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. (Franciscan Missionaries of Mary: Grottaferrata, Italy, 1913), 4.
her Catechism, giving classes to her and other children in the village as there was no school in the Parish at that time.\textsuperscript{60}

**Helene’s World Expands**

At about eight years of age, Helene met Jeanne Jugan, the Foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, while she was visiting Helene’s mother. Helene heard tales of the works of the Sisters and the causes of the problems they were facing. Helene recalled this visit in her writings saying how this visit impressed her very deeply.\textsuperscript{61}

While still quite young Helene also met Mgr. John Chanche, the Bishop of Natchez, an American-Indian diocese in North America, who had been a fellow student with her father in the United States. On one particular visit to the family the bishop spoke to Helene of the Native Americans, “savages…who wore no clothes…and did not know Jesus, or Mary.”\textsuperscript{62} The bishop asked Helene if she would be a missionary when she was older. After some deliberation, Helene’s reply to the Bishop was: “All right, your Excellency, I will be a missionary!”\textsuperscript{63} Helene later admitted that she never thought of these words again for many years.

In 1850 Helene made her first communion and also received the sacrament of Confirmation. It was a difficult time, for immediately before the ceremony, Helene vomited. This affliction would remain with her for the rest of her life and cause her to become so weak that she was frequently bedridden. It was said to have been “…a weakness she had been suffering from ever since a slight case of poisoning when she was very young…”\textsuperscript{64}

In November 1854 at the age of fifteen Helene joined the Sodality of the Children of Mary in Nantes. This organisation’s aim was to foster devotion to Mary among Catholic girls between the ages of ten and eighteen, and at the same time to educate them in the Catholic faith.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{60} Cited in Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 37.
\textsuperscript{61} Helene de Chappotin, in *Mary of the Passion*, 12.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{65} A lay society in the Church from 1830 whose aim is to “foster extraordinary devotion for the Blessed Mother among the young.” http://www.thechildrenofmary.net/history.asp (accessed 10 January, 2013).
Helene was ridiculed by her upper-class friends when she joined, as the Sodality was considered by them to be only for ‘poor’ girls. In fact, it was at first, “limited to only the orphans and students cared for by the Sisters of Charity.” Yet despite their mockery Helene remained with the group. One month after Helene joined the Children of Mary, Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, reinforcing devotion to Mary.

The Sodality of the Children of Mary held annual retreats, and these were mostly given by the Jesuits who were living in Nantes at the time. Helene described her feelings prior to the retreat in 1856: “Before me the void grew ever bigger. What was worth loving?” Yet it was during that retreat that Helene had a profound religious experience which remained with her for the rest of her life:

I was totally overcome by the words: “It is I who will always love you more than you will ever love Me.” Then, the sight of his beauty! After this grace I could never detach myself from His beauty!

**Significance**

The above overview of Helene’s childhood shows that she was well-educated in both religious and secular matters, and practised the numerous devotions popular of that time. The strong, Catholic atmosphere of the Chappotin household left its indelible mark on Helene. Her search for love and something worth loving, seen for example in her rejection of dolls, was answered in her experience of God’s love during the Retreat of 1856.

The ultramontanist orientation of her family grounded Helene’s dedication to the person of the Pope from an early age. This devotion, however, was be the cause of great suffering later in life. Helene’s strong sense of loyalty to the King, demonstrated in her desire to be another ‘Joan of Arc’ for him, would be quite moderated as she became aware of the very poor living conditions of many of her fellow citizens. Much later, upon her return from India in 1876,

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66 Ibid.
67 Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 49.
70 Ibid.
72 Cf. Chapter Three.
she found an anti-Catholic Republic well established in France, which ended the French monarchy.

**The Religious Situation of Nineteenth Century France**

One of the root causes of the French Revolution of 1789 is explained as follows:

The Church had been deeply involved with the old Feudal order of Europe, which was being swept away by the industrialisation spreading across the Continent, by political movements for freedom and democracy particularly as unleashed by the French Revolution in 1789, and by the new philosophies of liberalism and socialism, which often wanted to shape a new world without the moral or social constraints of the Church.\(^73\)

Later, Protestants and Jews, as well as secularists, struggling to be free from the influence of the Catholic Church, were seen by the Church in the nineteenth century as dangerous to the stability and moral integrity of the nation:

The majority of the population of France was made up of commoners, who resented the privileges enjoyed by the nobles and clergy... In 1804 Napoleon...took the crown from the Pope [Pius VII, 1800-23] and placed it on his head himself, thereby directly challenging the authority of the church.\(^74\)

The nineteenth century was a time when French Catholicism was on the rise again following the French Revolution. These decades saw a tremendous development in religious life following a very low period. “Catholic Christianity in France was completely transformed from the ruinous state to which the Revolution had reduced it.....”\(^75\) It is reported that “in the hundred years after 1815 more new orders and congregations came into existence through which men and women devoted themselves to the Church than in any previous period of equal

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\(^{75}\) McMillan, “Catholic Christianity in France from the Restoration to the separation of church and state, 1815-1905.” Vol. 8, 218.
length.” In France alone, in the eighty years “between 1800 and 1880 almost 400 new female orders were founded and some 200,000 women took religious vows.” This phenomenal surge in women entering convents in France is explained by one author as follows:

The religious orders were…to offer women a real vocation in life, apart from the normally obligatory motherhood. They appealed to young women with a desire to serve their fellow beings, as one can see from the real devotion with which the bonnes soeurs tended the young, the old, and the ill.

Apart from the surge in numerous religious Congregations at that time, the laity also enjoyed a revival in devotions, especially those who espoused the French School of Spirituality.

**The French School of Spirituality**

The dominant spirituality in the French Catholic Church during the seventeenth century was called the “French School of Spirituality,” and was considered “a powerful spiritual, missionary, and reform movement that animated the Church in France in the early seventeenth century.” It fostered various devotional practices within Catholicism; for instance, veneration of God expressed in devotion to the Trinity, the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and also numerous devotions to Mary of Nazareth.

Writing in 2009, the theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, wrote of these new expressions of devotion to Mary:

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77 McMillan, “Catholic Christianity in France…” 218. The majority of these new Orders were active rather than enclosed communities.

78 Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 118. There have been surges in entries to women’s congregations throughout history similar to that following the French revolution, and this will be studied in Chapter Four.


81 Cf. Glendon, “French School of Spirituality.”
In the seventeenth century, new Marian feasts, titles, institutions, and forms of piety blossomed; specialized literature running to thousands of volumes appeared in a profusion of...’Mariology.’ The term itself was coined by Nicholas Nigido in his treatise *Summa sacrae Mariologiae* written in 1602... The effect was to cut thought about Mary off from the rest of theology, especially treatments of Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the church...\(^\text{82}\)

The importance of devotion to Mary is recounted by Missiologist Larry Nemer. Writing of the nineteenth and twentieth century devotions, he described: “French missionaries before leaving for their mission would visit several Churches in Paris. In each of them there was a statue or picture of Mary which had spoken or cried or smiled; no missionary would venture out without a deep devotion to Mary.”\(^\text{83}\) Helene was imbued with this devotion so much as to put the Institute she was to found under the patronage of Mary.\(^\text{84}\)

The French School of Spirituality were strongly promoted by a French lay woman, Madame Barbe Jeanne Acarie (1566-1618), a mystic and stigmatine who was beatified in 1791. Madame Acarie held gatherings in her home for discussion on spiritual and theological issues. Among the regular visitors were the Jesuit Pere Coton, Vincent de Paul, Michel de Marillac, and also Francis of Sales who for six months had been Madame Acarie's spiritual director.\(^\text{85}\) Madame Acarie was also consulted on a daily basis by numerous people for advice and spiritual guidance.\(^\text{86}\) She was instrumental in arranging to have the Carmelite Sisters in France: “…in 1604, having won the approval of the king, Henry IV, she established a community of the Reformed (Discalced) Order of Carmelites in Paris.”\(^\text{87}\) Married for thirty years, she had six children, and after the death of her husband she joined a Carmelite convent, receiving the name ‘Mary of the Incarnation.’\(^\text{88}\)

Pierre de Berulle (1575-1629), a young cousin of Madame Acarie, often witnessed her in ecstasy as a child when the mystic was living in the Berulle house. Later as a seminarian and

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\(^{84}\) Cf. Chapter Three.


\(^{86}\) Ibid.


then a priest, Berulle visited Madame Acarie daily. Berulle went on to found the Oratory, an organisation for the education of diocesan clergy. Berulle is named as one of the founders of the French School of Spirituality.  

Raymond Deville, an author who studied aspects of Berulle’s spirituality, wrote: “The primary message that comes to us from Berulle and his disciples is of the grandeur and the holiness of God.” He went on to quote Berulle: “The first thing necessary is to look at God and not at oneself; to do nothing through self-consideration or self-seeking, but only through a gaze fixed purely and solely on God.” Another author quoted Berulle’s somewhat pessimistic outlook: “The state to which we have been reduced by the sin of our first father...is deplorable...For in this state we possess rights only to nothingness and to hell, and we can do nothing but sin, and we are but a nothingness opposed to God.”

The French School of Spirituality’s strong Marian emphasis was advocated by Berulle who said that “one goes to Jesus ‘through Mary’, in the sense of being formed in the school of Mary.” Glendon quoted Berulle speaking on Mary: “The heart of the Virgin is the first altar on which Jesus offered his heart, body and spirit as a host of perpetual praise; and where Jesus offers his first sacrifice…”

Another adherent of this School of Spirituality is Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, a seventeenth century mystic, who explained her understanding of the incarnation as “the Son’s abasement before the Father, whereby he enters into the ‘state of perpetual victimhood,’ ...the role of the humanity of Jesus as the never-to-be-bypassed mediator of union with God.”

The French School of Spirituality was influenced by the Spanish reform under Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. According to the Marquise de Breaute, Acarie

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89 Cf. Glendon, “French School of Spirituality.”
also “helped greatly in the re-establishment of regularity in most of the houses of nuns which were reformed in her time.”\textsuperscript{96} Acarie’s biographer, Sheppard, explains further: “The whole emphasis of religious life underwent a profound change in the seventeenth century, first with the coming of the mystical movement and then with the development of what can only be called an anthropocentric spirituality.”\textsuperscript{97}

A co-founder of the French School of Spirituality was Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657) who established the Order of St Sulpice (the Sulpicians) for the education of the clergy.\textsuperscript{98} A community was set up in the United States and later opened to boys from families of good social status when the Order needed the extra income to maintain the seminary.\textsuperscript{99} Its aim was to form an elite who would then occupy an important place in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States.\textsuperscript{100} Helene’s father Charles was sent there as a ten-year old boy to further his studies, and completed his secondary schooling there.\textsuperscript{101} It is evident from the various books of this particular spirituality in the home library at Le Fort that he imbibed some of the teachings of the ‘French School of Spirituality’ during his time with the Sulpicians. One can see the influence of this particular spirituality in Helene’s later writings.\textsuperscript{102}

Glendon expressed his admiration for this French School of Spirituality in the following words: “Rarely had such a deep sense of the communion with God in the Spirit of Jesus Christ been expressed and written not only for priests and religious but for the laity as well.”\textsuperscript{103} It also had “a profound respect for the unique work of the Holy Spirit in the individual person.”\textsuperscript{104}

An excellent summary of the French School of Spirituality has been given by the same author:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[96] Quoted in Sheppard, \textit{Barbe Acarie, Wife and Mystic}, 84.
\item[97] Ibid., 5.
\item[99] Ibid.
\item[100] Cf. \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus} Vol 1, 17, footnote 54.
\item[102] Cf. Chapter Four, \textit{Helene’s Missionary Spirituality}.
\item[103] Glendon, “French School of Spirituality, 422.
\item[104] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
The French School offers a powerful spiritual synthesis, blending profound mysticism with zeal and energy for reform. Rarely has such a deep sense of the communion with God in the Spirit of Jesus Christ been expressed and written not only for priests and religious but for the laity as well.105

**Devotions during the Nineteenth Century**

As noted above, devotions to Mary of Nazareth flourished over the centuries. The mid nineteenth century was seen as “the beginning of an era sometimes referred to as the Marian Century, with a proliferation of often highly sentimental forms of piety proliferating as a reaction against the increasingly rationalist and scientific ethos of the time.”106 Apparitions of Mary were frequent in France during this period:

The mounting tide of Marian devotion among the mass of Catholics was given further impetus by a series of apparitions of the Virgin, all at places in France, but soon to become famed throughout the world: in particular to Catherine Laboure in 1830, the start of what has been called the ‘epic of the miracle-working medallion’ and most renownedly to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858.107

During Helene’s lifetime there were numerous other apparitions to which she referred in her writings; for example, to two children, Maximin Giraud and Melanie Mathieu in September 1846 at La Salette,108 and apparitions at Pontmain in 1870,109 and Tilly-sur-Seulles between 1896 and 1899.110

The prominence given to devotions to Mary of Nazareth, the apparitions, and the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1858, all enhanced Helene’s special devotion to Mary to the point that she would place her new Institute under Mary’s patronage. In fact, many of the communities of women and men religious founded during the nineteenth century were similarly dedicated to Mary. Aubert states that “between 1802 and 1898 not a year passed without the foundation of one or even several religious congregations dedicated to the Virgin,

105 Ibid.
with France well in the lead....”\textsuperscript{111} In Italy, “between 1802 and 1898, there were 206, of which 23 were masculine.”\textsuperscript{112}

Pilgrimages to Marian shrines subsequently became very popular and were advertised in a French information bulletin, \textit{Le Pelerin}, which “featured pictures of sanctuaries, details of itineraries and cut-price fares as well as breathless stories of miracles and cures.”\textsuperscript{113} In 1873 alone there were 140,000 pilgrims to Lourdes from forty-seven dioceses in France.\textsuperscript{114}

There were also numerous pilgrims to the shrine of the Sacred Heart at Paray-le-Monial in France. This was where the Sacred Heart appeared to a nun of the Visitation Order, Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1673. However, this particular devotion was not welcomed by all as the shrine to the Sacred Heart was seen as provocative by some because in France the symbol of the Sacred Heart had been used on a banner representing the royalists as opposed to the Republicans.\textsuperscript{115}

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was also a regular devotion particularly during retreats. Helene had attended a retreat in the house of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Cenacle, who combined the contemplative life with daily adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Helene was very impressed with their lifestyle.

This surge in various devotions, pilgrimages, shrines, and indulgences can be seen as a reaction to the lack of participation by the laity in the liturgical celebrations which were in Latin, not the vernacular, and performed almost entirely by the clergy. These devotions on the other hand allowed for a fuller involvement of the laity - heart and soul. Historian James McMillan wrote of this phenomenon:

\textsuperscript{111} Aubert et al, \textit{The Church in a Secularised Society}, 119.
\textsuperscript{112} Marie-Christine Bérenger, FMM, “Mother Mary of the Passion and Father Raphael, Two Christians of the XIX Century,” \textit{Meeting Space}, January-February 2011, 31.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
…the clerical recuperation of popular religion…(the mix of animist and heterodox Christian beliefs which held sway in much of the countryside…) the Church succeeded as never before in narrowing the gap between the religion of the people and the religion of the clergy, largely by embracing beliefs and practices which had powerful resonances with the religious impulses of the rural masses: the cult of saints, the veneration of shrines, the organisation of pilgrimages and enthusiasm for miracles.\textsuperscript{116}

Significance

Helene espoused the devotional practices of her time and later introduced many of them into the spiritual exercises within her Institute. These included devotions to the Trinity, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed, devotion to the Sacred Heart, and the special place of Mary as the first missionary and ‘superior general’ of the new Institute.\textsuperscript{117} One can hear echoes of these sentiments throughout Helene’s writings and in her letters to her Sisters recommending special devotion to Mary of Nazareth, to the point of putting the Institute she would found under the protection of Mary, by naming the Institute, ‘Missionaries of Mary.’ However, whilst keeping some works from the French School of Spirituality on hand while drafting the first Constitutions, Helene was not influenced by the negative aspects of Berulle’s spirituality: ‘...we can do nothing but sin...’\textsuperscript{118} Rather, she maintained her faith and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the rest of her life.\textsuperscript{119} As can be seen, then, these devotions were to be the foundation of the spirituality of her Institute.

The political reality of the Nineteenth Century France

Nineteenth century political life in France was still reeling from the aftermath of the French Revolution. There were constant struggles between groups fighting for a Republic, and others (mostly Catholics) supporting the control of the Church over civil as well as religious matters.

During the French Revolution “Nantes suffered the ruthless repression of an envoy of the French Revolution named Jean-Baptiste Carrier.”\textsuperscript{120} This period (September 1793 to July

\textsuperscript{116} McMillan, “Catholic Christianity in France, 1815-1905,” 220.
\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Chapter Three of this paper, “The Founding of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.”
\textsuperscript{118} Cf. Thompson, Berulle and the French School, 40; and Positio Super Virtutibus, Vol I, 686.
\textsuperscript{119} Cf. Chapters Two and Three of this paper.
1794) was referred to as ‘The Reign of Terror.’ Carrier was considered very brutal even by his own followers. In 1793 he replaced executions by the guillotine, which he considered too slow, with mass drownings: “...during the last six weeks of the Terror alone (the period known as the "Red Terror") nearly fourteen hundred people were guillotined in Paris alone.”

Under his reign “harsh measures were taken against the alleged enemies of the Revolution, the economy was placed on a wartime basis, and mass conscription was undertaken.”

The people of Nantes, particularly targeted by Carrier and his followers for their support of the monarchy, suffered materially as well as physically. An entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for 1910 states:

> Having warmly embraced the cause of the revolution in 1789, the city [Nantes] was in 1793 treated with extreme vigour by J. B. Carrier, envoy of the Committee of Public Safety, whose *noyades* or wholesale drowning of prisoners became notorious.

The cruelty of Carrier was reported more graphically as follows:

> After a mission to Normandy, Carrier was sent, early in October 1793, to Nantes, under orders from the Convention to suppress the revolt there by the most severe measures. He established a revolutionary tribunal, and formed a body of desperate men, called the Legion of Marat, to dispose quickly of the masses of prisoners heaped in the jails. The form of trial was soon discontinued, and the victims were sent to the guillotine or shot or cut down in the prisons en masse.

This wholesale attack on the people of Nantes left them a great deal ‘poorer’, according to their own evaluation of the situation. According to one author, they had become very rich from the shipping businesses, but now were merely ‘comfortable.’ Therefore, they longed for the return of the monarchy.

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122 Ibid.
The political events involving the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte [1769-1821] affected the whole region of Spain, France, Germany and Italy. As noted above, the aristocracy of Brittany supported the French monarchy and resisted the revolutionary uprisings against the monarchy. Following the French Revolution and the execution of the King, the Bretons fought for the return of the Bourbon dynasty and the re-establishment of the monarchy. With the abdication of Napoleon on 11 April 1814 and his exile, the Bourbon Dynasty was restored to France in the person of Louis XVIII, brother of Louis XVI. However, Napoleon escaped from exile and so King Louis was forced to flee in March 1815. Louis was again restored after the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo on 7 July. The resulting regime, known as the July Monarchy, lasted until the Revolution of 1848 when Louis was forced to abdicate and the short-lived French Second Republic was established.

The last Bourbon claimant to the French throne was proclaimed by some supporters as Henry V, but the French monarchy was never restored. Henri lived until 1883 when his death without any heirs marked the end of the French Bourbons. In 1889 France's Third Republic celebrated the centenary of the French Revolution with the building of the Eiffel Tower. The desire of many citizens in France to be free of the influence of the popes and kings led to violence and hatred, particularly between Catholics and Protestants, but later, where possible, even against any overt religious symbols. This reaction was in part due to make the French Catholic Church independent of the papacy and subservient to the French King. The monetary support of the Catholic Church was subsequently decreased substantially because financial payment to Rome from the Churches ceased.

This antagonism between Church and State has continued well into the twentieth century. In France today, notwithstanding the income generated by pilgrimages, especially to Lourdes, the Notre Dame Cathedral and other places for tourism, symbols and signs of any religion are

banned: “France’s national assembly has voted by 366 to one in favour of a ban on face coverings in public places... and obvious religious symbols were banned in French state schools.”132

In France, this anti-religious stance continued to the present day. France demanded that no reference be made to the religious history of Europe in the text of the European Union Constitution:

Concretely, it was, of course, the veto of France, America’s sister republic in matters of religion-state separation, that wrecked a reference to Christianity or God in Europe’s draft constitution, which had been pushed by German, Italian, Polish, and Slovenian delegates... when the European Union had a chance to define itself, in the preamble of its never-realized constitution, a reference to Europe’s Christian roots was refused, though not without a fight.133

This veto by France was deemed as neglectful of the profound influence of Christianity: “…before the era of nation-states Europe was much more of a social and cultural unity than it is now, and the content of that unity was the Christian religion.”134

In contrast to France, some other members of the European Union were more circumspect: “For their part, Germany, Austria, and Spain, all adhering to an open, accommodating neutrality, grant public status to society’s main faiths...”135

Nevertheless, surveys carried out on the European Union in 2012 show high levels of religious intolerance still exist: “Discrimination based on religion or beliefs is seen as most widespread in France (66%), followed by Belgium (60%), Sweden (58%), Denmark (54%), the Netherlands (51%) and the UK (50%).136
Conflict over Control of the Papal States

In order to understand Helene’s strong attachment to the person and position of the pope, it is necessary to look at the rise of Ultramontanism, and the relationship between France and the papacy. The years which led up to the wars over the papal territories in Rome in the late 1800s were very influential.

The phenomenon of Ultramontanism consisted of a strong, personal devotion to the person of the Pope and the unquestioning acceptance of his authority. It was very strong during the last half of the nineteenth century in France, and it influenced Helene’s family. The impetus for such a movement was the strong insistence by the popes “that the Church must be free from that domination by the state which had been the rule since the rise of the absolute monarchies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.”

This emphasis on the person of the pope was seen as a way of bolstering the claim that Catholicism should be the only religion of France, and indeed of all of Europe:

Rejecting the principles of the French revolution in which they saw the realization of a process started by the Protestant Reformation and intensified by the Enlightenment...the ‘Traditionalists’...stressed the necessity of an irrecusable authority which they placed in the papacy.

Ultramontanism was in direct opposition to “Gallican meaning independent of, or opposed to, direction by the papacy.” A further strengthening of Ultramontanism evolved later under Pope Pius IX [1846-78] due to his many sufferings: “A great popular devotion sprang up among Catholics who saw him as a symbol of Catholic fidelity under persecution.” Duncan explained: “...Ultramontane sentiment...became an important means of increasing Roman control and centralisation in policy and the appointment of bishops.” Later in 1870 at the First Vatican Council, its members “affirmed the Ultramontane movement,

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140 Ibid., 17.
141 Ibid.
strengthening the Vatican’s authority by declaring the doctrine of papal infallibility.”\textsuperscript{142} As one author expressed it, the papacy had “resumed the modis operandi of a monarchy.”\textsuperscript{143}

Helene was greatly influenced by the deep devotion to the popes and later, after establishing her own Institute, advocated reparation be made for the offences against the popes and the Catholic Faith.\textsuperscript{144} Some of those in favour of the Republic accused Catholics of putting “the Roman fatherland above the French one.”\textsuperscript{145}

Following the ‘War of the Poor’ in Italy [1860-1865], some of the measures introduced by the new Regime there were:

- Separation of church and state was instituted, although not as thoroughly as in some other European countries.
- Higher education became a state responsibility; marriages stayed a church affair.
- Jews were granted full emancipation.\textsuperscript{146}

As history shows, the pope of the day, Pius IX, refused to cede any of the papal territories, and railed against education coming under the jurisdiction of the secular State, writing: “...the recent wrongdoing which has strengthened some wretched enemies of all truth, justice and honour, who strive both openly and deceitfully with plots of every sort to spread their disorders everywhere among the faithful people of Italy.”\textsuperscript{147}

Civic and Church authorities were still at loggerheads over the possession of the Vatican territories. After negotiations between the Government and the Pope failed, Italian troops invaded Rome in September 1870 and declared it the capital of Italy.\textsuperscript{148} However, Pius IX refused to leave the Vatican. This led to the Pope referring to himself as the “Prisoner of the


\textsuperscript{144} Cf. Chapter Three, \textit{Interim “Plan” of the Institute}.


\textsuperscript{148} Ganse, “Italy 1860-1876.
Vatican.” The historian Alex Vidler stated that Pius IX did not see the writing on the wall, and that what he “can be blamed for is that he failed to read the signs of the times. He failed to perceive that the Church had got to adjust itself to new political realities…”

Subsequent popes continued to considered themselves also as voluntary ‘prisoners in the Vatican.’ This continued until the Lateran Treaty was signed in 1929 by Pope Pius XI [1922-39], acknowledging the existence of the kingdom of Italy, and the Italian parliament in its turn, recognised the Papal State, the Vatican.

Later, after living in Rome and witnessing the desire of its inhabitants for the separation of Church and State, Helene came to realise the changing attitudes to the people’s desire for temporal power, particularly under Leo XIII’s papacy [20.2.1878-20.7.1903]. Helene then changed her mind regarding the supremacy of the pope over all areas of life, accepting the will of the Italian inhabitants.

Pope Leo XIII, while working to bring about peace and good relationships between the Papacy and the State, stressed the importance of the common good. Yet at the same time the Pope emphasised that the Church was to be recognised and protected by the ruling governments:

…it is a sin for the State not to have care for religion as a something beyond its scope, or as of no practical benefit...All who rule, therefore, would hold in honour the holy name of God, and one of their chief duties must be to favour religion, to protect it, to shield it under the credit and sanction of the laws, and neither to organize nor enact any measure that may compromise its safety, care must especially be taken to preserve unharmed and unimpeded the religion...

Pope Leo XIII continued, emphasising the God-given status of the Church:

149 “With the fall of Rome (20 September 1870) and of the temporal power, the saddened Pontiff considered himself a prisoner of the Vatican…” “Pope Pius IX,” http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20000903_pius-ix_en.html (accessed 5 September, 2007).


152 Cf. Chapter Five.


154 Ibid.
... and just as the end at which the Church aims is by far the noblest of ends, so is its authority the most exalted of all authority, nor can it be looked upon as inferior to the civil power, or in any manner dependent upon it... In very truth, Jesus Christ gave to His Apostles unrestrained authority in regard to things sacred... [10, 11].

Victor Emmanuel, [14 March 1820 – 9 January 1878], the first king of a united Italy since the 6th century, was succeeded by his son Umberto [9 January 1878 – 29 July 1900] whose wife, Queen Margaret, was very concerned with the social situation of the people. The queen asked the Institute to cooperate with her in addressing the problems of the poor. This contact lead to the close friendship between the queen and Helene. Helene was able to obtain funding for numerous endeavours in cooperation with Queen Margaret.

**Significance**

The inhabitants of Nantes were very much in favour of the supremacy of the pope over any secular leader. Helene had been regaled with stories of the heroism of those members of her family who had fought and died for the Church as members of the papal army defending the Papal States.

The sufferings of the popes and clergy along with her family’s fidelity to the papacy led Helene to stress devotion to the person of the Pope in the Plan for her Institute, written in 1877, “…the visible Head of the Church for whose triumph each member of the Institute especially consecrates herself to God.”

**The Social Situation of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France**

**Wealth Gained through Slavery**

Being from an aristocratic family and living on an exclusive estate, Helene was somewhat protected from the poverty and injustices affecting the majority of other French citizens.

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155 Ibid.
157 Letter of Helene to her spiritual director, 31 May, 1900, quoted in An Apostle Sent by God, 4.
158 Mary of the Passion, “Plan of the Institute of the Religious Missionaries of Mary,” in Rome, My Spiritual Homeland), 155-159.
Nantes, Helene’s home town located on the banks of the Loire River, was the principal Atlantic port for France. It was also the slave trade capital of France during the eighteenth century, and proved to be very lucrative, with Nantes becoming a wealthy city. As stated above, both sides of Helene’s family had owned plantations on Santo Domingo (the western part of which had been ceded to the French by the Spanish in 1697) and Cuba, and made their wealth through these holdings. The involvement of France in the slavery of black Africans lasted longer than the other European colonisers. As one researcher stated:

...sons of French nobility, along with creative investors who built coffee and sugar plantations out of raw Haitian land, could expect to double their money every 10 years. An entire French shipbuilding industry grew out of the need to provide vessels to handle the mushrooming commerce -- and the slave trade.160

Numerous Black Africans were kidnapped and shipped to the Caribbean from Senegal, a former French colony.161 They were taken to the West Indies where they were sold for goods which were then brought back to Europe.162 By 1670 the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Christopher had 300 sugar estates, as sugar was a much-desired delicacy.163

The slave trade from Africa to the Caribbean via Nantes, as was said earlier, was very lucrative: “Between 1738 and 1745, Nantes alone carried 55,000 slaves to the New World in 180 ships. In all, from 1713 to 1775 nearly 800 different vessels sailed from Nantes in the slave trade.”164 On 1 June 1731 the first slave ships were shipped out of Nantes destined for the French West Indian island of Martinique. At one stage there were 5,000 white people ruling over 500,000 black slaves.165

Slavery had been condemned on many occasions by various Church officials and the leading figures of the Enlightenment. Centuries before, in 1435 Pope Eugene IV, wrote an Encyclical

condemning slavery of the Black inhabitants of the Canary Islands.\footnote{Pope Eugene IV, Encyclical Sicut Dudum (Against the Enslaving of Black Natives from the Canary Islands), http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Eugene04/eugene04sicut.htm (accessed 9 April, 2014).} Slavery was at one time thought to be permissible, not only by several French clergy, but also by other church officials, particularly with regard to indigenous and black peoples. The reason for this was that the indigenous and blacks were not considered to be human by certain people. The matter was resolved by Pope Paul III in 1537 when he declared that indigenous persons were indeed human, and therefore should not be enslaved.\footnote{Paul III in, Sublimis Deus of 1537 (on the enslavement and evangelization of Indians), http://www.nndb.com/people/303/000095018/ (accessed 10 June, 2009).} This affected the Spanish and Portuguese colonisers who were using the indigenous peoples of the Americas as slaves and, as these were dying rapidly from disease and exhaustion, black peoples had been brought from Africa to replace them as slaves.\footnote{Royal Museum, Timeline of Slavery, http://www.nmm.ac.uk/freedom/viewTheme.cfm/theme/timeline (accessed 11 July, 2007).} “By the 1780s nearly two-thirds of France’s foreign investments were based on Saint-Domingue, and the number of stopovers by oceangoing vessels sometimes exceeded 700 per year.”\footnote{BBC. “Haiti,” http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/251961/Haiti (accessed 6 November, 2008).}

Calls for the emancipation of slaves were resounding throughout Europe, yet officials of the French Assembly could not agree to abolish slavery and made a proposal for inaction. The French slave trade officially continued, with a bonus being given for every slave, until 1793. Mulattos in Santo Domingo, who aspired to equality, learning that their hopes had been quashed in the French Assembly, rose up in revolt. Santo Domingo's slaves then rose up also in a bloody insurrection. However, the British eventually occupied Santo Domingo, reinstated slavery, and handed the island back to France at the Peace of Amiens in 1802.\footnote{Ibid.}

As late as 1830 Nantes still had 80 ships involved in the slave trade. From 1850 to 1870 some 18,400 Africans were transported to the French West Indies illegally, most likely by Cuban slave traders.\footnote{Ibid.}
There were many decrees against slavery by popes over the years. In 1890 Pope Leo XIII also strongly condemned slavery:

We prohibit and strictly forbid any Ecclesiastic or lay person from presuming to defend as permissible this traffic in Blacks under no matter what pretext or excuse, or from publishing or teaching in any manner whatsoever, in public or privately, opinions contrary to what We have set forth in this Apostolic Letter....How horrible it is to recall that almost four hundred thousand Africans of every age and sex are forcefully taken away each year from their villages! Bound and beaten, they are transported to a foreign land, put on display, and sold like cattle …

The following statement from Helene’s father, Charles, gives an indication of his either ignorance of the papal decrees or of his acceptance of slavery:

If a republic were proclaimed or if some other upheaval were to take place (in France), we should be happy to have a place to which we could retire, and this would not be the case if we abandoned our blacks and our land.

Helene’s maternal great-grandfather went to Santo Domingo, leaving his family in Nantes, because he could not find “a manager who will not steal, who will look after your black people, who will take care of your animals, and who will not drain all the goodness out of your soul…” It appears, however, that Helene was unaware of these sentiments as a child, or had not reflected on the implications of such abuse of others and the servitude imposed on a whole race of people. Helene’s attitude to the black peoples of Africa seems to have been influenced by her family and her country’s approaches to them as seen when, sending Sisters to the Congo, she warned against educating them too much or “they might become too independent.”

The above accounts of slavery show that both sides of Helene’s family maintained slaves and that they considered the slaves and their properties in Santo Domingo and Cuba as their own

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175 Phillippe Galbaud in St Domingo, quoted in *Launay, Helene de Chappotin*, 31.

176 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 288.
possessions with little awareness of the rights of the local peoples. In an article on slavery, Rodney Stark wrote: “The problem wasn't that the leadership was silent. It was that almost nobody listened.”

In order to address the evil of slavery, Pope Leo XIII “…delegated the task of going to the principal countries of Europe to Our beloved son Charles Martial Cardinal Lavigerie…to show how shameful this base dealing is and to incline the leaders and citizens to assist this miserable race.” Helene was later to meet Cardinal Lavigerie, although there is no record of her family’s knowledge of this letter of Pope Gregory.

Santo Domingo finally underwent a successful slave revolt in 1791 and achieved freedom, renaming itself, Haiti. This was the first post-colonial country of black Africans to free itself from its colonisers. This did not stop the slave trade, though, for the focus of the traders was transferred to the island of Reunion. Between 1825 and 1845 about 25,000 to 30,000 slaves were brought to that island.

The slave trade in Cuba also had a devastating effect on the local indigenous peoples:

The history of Cuba began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 and the subsequent invasion of the island by the Spaniards. Aboriginal groups—the Guanahatabey, Ciboney, and Taíno—inhabited the island but were soon eliminated or died as a result of diseases or the shock of conquest. Colonial society developed slowly after Spain colonized the island in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; pastoral pursuits and agriculture served as the basis of the economy... Slaves arrived in increasing numbers; large estates squeezed out smaller ones; sugar supplanted tobacco, agriculture, and cattle as the main occupation...

179 Cf. Chapter Three, Removal as Superior General.
181 Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 22.
Following years of wars for independence, the island passed from Spanish to North American control: “In December 1898, with the Treaty of Paris, the United States emerged as the victorious power in the Spanish-American War, thereby ensuring the expulsion of Spain and U.S. tutelage over Cuban affairs.”

**Extreme Poverty in the aftermath of the Revolution**

A further social factor in France was the extreme poverty leading up to the Revolution in 1789. There had been crop failures due to drought, then to destructive hail storms, and then French markets had been opened to English products, leading to mass unemployment. These problems compounded, leading to disease and famine. A further exacerbation of the people’s suffering was the large population of France in relation to other areas of Europe:

A leading cause of social stress in France during the Revolution was its large population. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, France had 20 million people living within its borders, a number equal to nearly 20 percent of the population of non-Russian Europe. Over the course of the century, that number increased by another 8 to 10 million, as epidemic disease and acute food shortages diminished and mortality declined. By contrast, it had increased by only 1 million between 1600 and 1700... This population was concentrated in the rural countryside: of the nearly 30 million French under Louis XVI (1754-1793), about 80 percent lived in villages of 2,000 or less.

This situation remained precarious well into the nineteenth century. By the time of Helene’s birth in 1839, the extreme poverty of the majority of the population was still a very serious matter. Workers’ wages were very inadequate and starvation was rampant. This is the leading cause of the revolt in 1848, which eventually brought about the end of the Bourbon rule in France. Also, within a month of the February Revolution in France, revolutions occurred in Berlin, Budapest, Prague, Milan, and Venice.

Besides the political revolutions within Europe, the industrial revolution of eighteenth century brought with it numerous problems:

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183 Ibid.
Chronic hunger and malnutrition were the norm for the majority of the population of the world including Britain and France, until the late 19th century... Clean water, sanitation, and public health facilities were inadequate; the death rate was high, especially infant mortality, and tuberculosis among young adults. Cholera from polluted water and typhoid were endemic.\footnote{187}{The Wikipedia contributors, “The Industrial Revolution,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution#Machine_tools (accessed 29 May, 2017).}

The expected economic growth, far from leading inevitably to development, resulted “in the ‘four Ds’ of disruption, deprivation, disease and death, because of its impact on social and political stability and order.”\footnote{188}{Richard Eckersley, \textit{Well & Good}, \textit{how we feel & why it matters.} (Text Publishing: Melbourne, 2004). 28, 29.} As an historian explained the situation: “What drove the industrial revolution were profound social changes, as Europe moved from a primarily agricultural and rural economy to a capitalist and urban economy, from a household, family-based economy to an industry-based economy.”\footnote{189}{Richard Hooker, “The Industrial Revolution,” http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ENLIGHT/ENLIGHT.HTM, (accessed 7 July, 2007).} This left many families with no home or land, and therefore no choice but to work in the factories or seek other sources of income which were available in the cities:

...historians generally agree that it (the Industrial Revolution) basically originated in England...The land was owned largely by wealthy and frequently aristocratic landowners; they leased the land to tenant farmers who paid for the land in real goods that they grew or produced... Parliament passed a series of laws that permitted lands that had been held in common by tenant farmers to be enclosed into large, private farms worked by a much smaller labour force. While this drove peasants off the land, it also increased agricultural production \textit{and} increased the urban population of England, since the only place displaced peasants had to go were the cities.\footnote{190}{Ibid.}

Hooker continued, explaining the change in values:

The diminished role of the aristocracy in English government and society, however, allowed for a steady shift in values; the values of the mercantile and capitalist classes slowly became the norm—the most important of these values was the pursuit of wealth. Adam Smith's, \textit{The Wealth of Nations} proposed that the only legitimate goal of national government and human activity is the steady increase in the overall wealth of the nation.\footnote{191}{Ibid. Adam Smith’s ideas of the responsibility of a government for its citizens were not taken up and many continue to be disenfranchised worldwide. Cf. \textit{The Wealth of Nations}. (USA: Random House USA Inc, 1994).}
Significance

The social setting in which Helene was reared was quite varied. Growing up in a stable situation at home, in a quite well-to-do milieu, Helene did not write of the source of both families’ incomes - the slaves used on their plantations in the Caribbean. Her Sisters made a foundation in Cuba in 1999, yet, although there were also plans to have a presence in Haiti, one of the poorest countries on earth, it never eventuated for lack of Sisters. The foundations in the Caribbean were later closed; “...the official closing of this Region took place on 30th June 2005...after 74 years of FMM presence in French Guiana, Guadeloupe and also in Surinam.”

Although there had been a revolt of the slaves in 1791 which began their struggle and eventually achieved independence in 1804, Haiti remains a troubled land today. “There arose a class system, still present today, with a minority of light skinned, sophisticated, Catholic, French-speaking Haitians at odds with dark-skinned, voodoo worshipping, Creole-speaking masses.”

As France had lost Haiti as a colony following the revolt of the slaves, it demanded compensation for its lost territory and income, and was supported in this claim by the United States of America. The United States assisted France in imposing an embargo so that no products would reach Haiti until compensation payments had begun. According to historian Peter Hallward, Haiti only finished the repayments in 1947. This was further evidence that France still refused to admit that slavery was morally wrong. The current president of Haiti, Aristide, has demanded that the money paid as compensation be returned; France should be refunding Haiti for its slave labour and the produce taken from it. In 2007, it was estimated that SUS21 billion was paid by Haiti to France in interest alone.

On the 30 January, 2006, the then President of France, Jacques Chirac, proclaimed that France would hold a national day of remembrance for the victims of slavery every 10 May. “The
date for the annual holiday was chosen as it marks the day in 2001 when France passed a law recognising slavery as a crime against humanity.” It has been estimated that France shipped 1,250,000 slaves before the abolition of slavery in 1848, while the rest of Europe had stopped the slave trade much earlier. During this time of slave-trading and colonization by European nations, the condemnations of slavery continued as shown above.

**The Missiology of the Nineteenth Century**

The missiology which guided the missionaries during the nineteenth century was the Gospel imperative, “Go make disciples of the nations…” (Mt 28:19). This was not considered as addressed to lay persons, but largely reserved to ‘professional’ missionaries: priests and religious who belonged to missionary Orders. This attitude is summed up by the missiologist, Peter Phan:

Prior to Vatican II...mission is (1) the Church’s work for the salvation of souls, (2) carried out for the benefit of the pagans abroad, (3) mainly by priests, religious brothers, nuns, and specially-commissioned layfolk, most from Europe and America, (4) with the financial and spiritual support of the laity back home, and (5) planting the Church in these “mission fields.”

Helene, like others around her, never questioned the inherent belief that the Catholicism was the only true religion. This idea held sway even at the Second Vatican Council, when the participants made it quite clear that faith is absolutely necessary: “...they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.” [LG 14; cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5]. In 1969 the theologian, Karl Rahner, who had been present at the Second Vatican Council as a *Peritus,* wrote:

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200 “*Peritus*” is Latin for “expert.” These were renowned theologians advising the participants, and included the moral theologian Rev. Bernard Haring.
The Christian knows that (all) must believe in God in order to be saved, and not only in God, but in Christ. Faith is not merely a positive commandment, from which one can be dispensed for sufficient reasons. This faith is intrinsically necessary to salvation and hence absolutely required, as the one possible means of attaining the end.”

The belief of the time in the superiority of the Catholic religion over all others resulted in an attitude towards other faiths that was overtly intolerant. On 20 November 1890, Leo XIII wrote that the “more serious apostolic concern orders us to spread the teaching of the Gospel in Africa. This teaching should bathe those inhabitants living in darkness and blind superstition with the light of divine truth.” Helene reflected this attitude in her own writings.

One reason for this attitude of supremacy on the part of the Papacy was “the Enlightenment’s emphasis on individual human experience as a key element of theological reflection.” The Roman authorities saw this stress on the human as a danger, “a kind of subjectivism that would lose sight of the objective truths of the faith…” This caused the over-reaction which resulted in the new Roman school of theology called ‘neo-scholasticism,’ which placed a strong emphasis on objective truths and dogmas. Helene, however, asked the Sisters to leave the discussion of these ideas to the Holy See.

The vast wealth of the Church was “very unevenly distributed. Whereas most of the bishops and dignitaries could live in opulence and luxury, the inferior clergy… were generally poor…” The bishops were said to be “more occupied with politics than with the spiritual care of their dioceses.” The privileged position of the nobility, and the clergy contributed to the anger of the average person and was one of the causes which led to the Revolution and the anti–catholic violence which ensued. Helene’s family were members of this upper class.

202 Leo XIII, Catholicae Ecclesiae, #3.
203 Cf. Chapter Five, Colonialism in Parts of Africa.
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
207 Cf. Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 513.
208 Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, 13.
209 Ibid., 12.
Pope Leo XIII [1878-1903] attempted to regulate the relationship between the Church and the governments of the day - particularly those of France and Italy. By means of his 1885 encyclical *Immortale Dei*, Leo XIII tried to bring about peace and a workable relationship between the Church and States. Yet at the same time he restated that the Church is the ultimate authority:

> And just as the end at which the Church aims is by far the noblest of ends, so is its authority the most exalted of all authority, nor can it be looked upon as inferior to the civil power, or in any manner dependent upon it…in the constitution of the State such as We have described, divine and human things are equitably shared; the rights of citizens assured to them, and fenced round by divine, by natural, and by human law; the duties incumbent on each one being wisely marked out, and their fulfilment fittingly insured.²¹⁰

As already noted, Helene and her family subscribed to this belief.

The struggle for papal dominance over secular as well as religious affairs continued. Following the First Vatican Council (1869-70) and the definition of the dogma of papal infallibility, the church became “increasingly centralised, strongly conservative in theology and often in politics, and bound together by Ultramontane piety and intense loyalty to the pope.”²¹¹

Historian John McManners summed up the situation between Church in France and the State in the nineteenth century:

> For long the Church had been regarded by its enemies as a propaganda department of the monarchical parties. How could this engrained suspicion be eradicated? How could the Catholics be persuaded to rally to the Republic, and how could the Republicans be persuaded that they had really done so?²¹²

McManners wrote that, in February 1892 Leo XIII, in an interview with a French journalist, spoke frankly of the right of the French people to their own leadership: “Each individual may

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retain his personal preferences, but in the sphere of action there is only one government, the
government which France has chosen for itself.” 213 McManners continued:

In so far as he had specific objectives within French politics, Leo XIII had
dreamed of a strong Catholic contingent operating within a conservative bloc.
These hopes were fading now. For the election of 1893…the Republican share of
the total vote rose from the 53% of 1889 to 82%. 214

In order to spread the teachings of the Catholic Church to other continents, Leo XIII called
for a common fund to cover the cost of the education of missionaries and the expenses
associated with setting up missions overseas. This was considered the role of the laity in
missionary endeavours:

This salutary work which we have long since commended to the zeal of the
faithful demands many others of similar scope. A great outlay is required to
provide for the education of missionaries, long journeys, constructing buildings,
erecting churches, and teaching, as well as for other similar necessities. These
expenses must be borne for some years, until the heralds of the gospel can
establish themselves and take responsibility for their own financial affairs. 215

The above struggles within the papacy and the Catholic Church in general influenced Helene
and her family; the belief in the superiority of the Catholic faith, and the position of ultimate
authority in the Pope. Helene continued her devotion to the person of the Pope after founding
her own Institute.

Summary

The era into which Helene was born was one of deep division between the Church and nation
States, particularly those of France and Italy. There was also a great deal of tension within
the Church itself in France because of many French Catholics’ struggle to retain their own
unique liturgy and spirituality. In Italy, it was the popes battling for civil and religious control
of the State.

213 Ibid., 73.
214 Ibid. 76.
215 Leo XIII, Catholicae Ecclesiae, #5.
The basis of Helene’s theology of mission was her experiences and education about other peoples and religions as a child. Although Helene had forgotten almost immediately about the visit of Bishop Chanche to the family home, she grew in her understanding of other peoples and their religions and needs, so much so that her passion as a foundress would be to spread the reign of God’s love to the whole world.

The gospel imperative to “make disciples of the nations” (Mt 28:19) was understood by the Catholic Church during the nineteenth century as making as many persons as possible Catholic. This in turn was presumed to include making them Western/European. This was also the unquestioned assumption of Helene. This belief in the superiority of the European culture over and above all others would influence many missionaries, Helene included. This resulted in many of the local peoples amongst whom they ministered placed at risk of losing their own cultural and religious practices.

Helene’s perception of other faiths and religions would evolve as she experienced a totally different world as a Religious Sister beyond Europe and outside of a Catholic milieu. The subject of the following Chapter will show Helene’s decisions were based on what she had experienced during her early years of religious life as a Poor Clare contemplative and a missionary in the Marie Reparatrice Society.
CHAPTER TWO

Helene’s early experiences of Religious Life

Overview

At the age of twenty-one Helene entered the convent of the Poor Clare Sisters, an enclosed Order, in her home town, Nantes. Forced to leave later due to ill health, she eventually joined another community, the Marie Reparatrice Society. Helene incorporated into the Institute she would find the practices she treasured from her time within these two communities: from her time with the Poor Clares, her love of contemplative prayer expressed in the spirituality of Saints Clare and Francis; from her time with the Marie Reparatrice Society the experience of Jesuit Spirituality and the passion for the development, both spiritual and social, of all peoples. Helene added to these priorities her deep concern for the advancement of women and girls.

Beginnings of A Religious Vocation

During a retreat in 1856 in Nantes Helene had an extraordinary experience of God’s love for her. She recounted the event saying, “I think I must have received something like the revelation of St. Paul on the road to Damascus, and after this grace I could never detach myself from his beauty.”\(^1\) During the Benediction she heard the words: “I will always love you more than you can love Me.”\(^2\) This moved her so much that she said: “...the idea of the religious life took possession of my awareness, and even of my desires, as the only possible life for me.”\(^3\)

Not having a great deal of knowledge about the numerous Orders at the time, Helene obeyed her spiritual director of the day to make a retreat with the Cenacle Sisters in 1859, thinking she might enter with them.\(^4\) When this community began in France in 1826, it was offering hostel services for women. Father Terme, the founder, introduced the Sisters to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. These Exercises became an important element in the spirituality of

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\(^1\) Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 31.
\(^2\) Ibid., 33.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid., 38.
the Cenacle Sisters. The hostel subsequently “became a retreat house, where women could deepen their prayer and grow in the spiritual life.”

Although Helene’s mother was aware of her desire to enter the convent, she had opposed it. Helene wrote of her mother’s reaction when told of her intention to enter: “She begged me at least to enter an Order into which she could follow me if ever she lost my father.” Having already lost two daughters through death, Helene was Sophie’s last daughter still alive. It came as such a shock when Helene told her mother of her determination to enter the convent that her mother had a stroke and died a few days later in 1859. Helene wrote that it was seven years before she could speak to anyone of this terrible wound: “My mother, the very idea of seeing me give myself to God had killed her!” Although a devout woman, Sophie’s faith did not sustain her at this moment. The thought of losing her third and only surviving daughter was too much for her.

Upon the death of her mother, Helene had to postpone her entry into the convent as she was required to take over the responsibilities of running the household. This experience would serve her well for the later religious community she would found. Her father went into a deep depression on the death of his wife, and never fully recovered. Helene’s grief would be further deepened, as her father would live only another eleven years, dying in 1872. In fact, Helene was destined to lose many more of her family members. All of her brothers and sisters would die before her, and only two of her ten nieces and nephews would outlive her.

**Helene’s Time with the Poor Clare Sisters**

Helene’s decision to enter the Poor Clare convent in Nantes was made in 1860 following a conversation with a friend who had met the Poor Clares. Helene went to meet the Abbess who gave her a book on the life of St Clare. Helene recounted her reaction on reading the text:

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6 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 37.
7 Ibid., 12.
8 Ibid., 39.
9 Cf. “Chronological Table” in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and It Risks, 1877-1984* (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1984), 964-971.
Until then I had never felt able to say, ‘I am made for this place or that.’ But at this moment my vocation was decided without my even realising it. Poverty took possession of my heart! I became a daughter of St Francis and have never ceased to be so.¹⁰

Helene finally entered the Poor Clare convent on 9 December, 1860. However, after only six weeks, at the end of January the following year, she was obliged to leave due to ill health.¹¹ Yet this was only the beginning of the influence that the Franciscan spirituality and contemplative lifestyle was to have on Helene.

The convent of the Poor Clare Sisters in Nantes was very stark, and there were none of the luxuries that Helene had been accustomed to enjoy at home. Helene learned of St Francis of Assisi’s love of ‘Lady Poverty;’ that God loved the world so much as to give us His Son (cf. John 3:16). The kenosis of Christ as seen in the incarnation is what St Francis saw as the utter poverty of Christ (cf. Phil 2:7), a poverty inspired by total love for God and for all of humanity, and indeed the whole of creation.¹² The gospel life which inspired St Francis and St Clare was to be the guiding light for Helene for the rest of her life.¹³

It was during her time with the Poor Clare Sisters that Helene had a profound spiritual experience in their Chapel. She wrote of this experience saying, that she “suddenly heard a voice, very clear and positive, though I don’t know if it was with my bodily ears. It said, ‘Are you willing to be crucified instead of the Holy Father?’...and I heard the name ‘Mary, Victim of Jesus, and of Jesus Crucified’.”¹⁴ Helene wrote in her spiritual notes of the impact that this had on her, stating that this name was imposed upon her.¹⁵ Helene’s understanding of the concept of ‘victim’ was to suffer in place of someone else who is innocent; in this case, the Pope. This experience in the chapel of being asked if she would offer herself as a victim led her to include the offering of oneself as a ‘victim’ as Christ had in the sense of suffering in the place of others or for others (cf. Luke 23:39-43). St Paul also taught this concept: “Jesus loved me gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). It is to spend one’s life for others.

¹⁰ Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 42.
¹³ Cf. Chapter Three, The Franciscan affiliation.
¹⁴ Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 46.
¹⁵ Helene de Chappotin, He Speaks to Me in the Heart of His Church. (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1971), 71.
This offering of one’s entire life for others was to be one of the three main elements of the new Institute she would one day found: missionaries, victims, and adorers.¹⁶

**Significance**

Helen’s time with the Poor Clares, though very brief, deepened her love for the gospel way of life, as lived for the poor. She desired to live the gospel life as did Saints Francis and Clare, with an emphasis on the Poor Christ. Her love for the contemplative way of life lived as a Poor Clare would be emphasised in her new Institute through the regular times for prayer throughout the day, and the importance placed on the hidden life modelled on that of the holy family at Nazareth.¹⁷

**Helene as a Marie Reparatrice Sister**

Forced to leave the Poor Clare monastery in 1861 after only six weeks due to ill health, Helene remained at home caring for her father until his recovery. Helene retained her desire to enter religious life again, expressing her conviction that “the idea of religious life was the only possible life for me.”¹⁸

In 1862, with the intense desire still within her to give herself to God, Helene spoke with Fr G. Petit SJ, who had been chosen by her cousins as the spiritual director of the family, about her desire to enter religious life. Helene’s father was being cared for by one of her brothers, who with his wife and children, came to live at the house in Nantes, leaving Helene free to enter the convent. She wished to return to the Poor Clare convent, but Fr Petit spoke of the Marie Reparatrice Sisters, whom he had supported in the foundation of their Society and who were affiliated to the Society of Jesus.¹⁹ Helene related in her memoirs that her heart was still with St Francis, but that her confessor insisted, “as though driven to it by God Himself...”²⁰ that she enter the Marie Reparatrice Society. Much later, Helene expressed her sadness at this...
decision to obey her spiritual director: “By making me follow another road they thwarted
God’s plan for me.” On another occasion she lamented: “The memory of my Poor Clares
still tore at my heart!”

The Marie Reparatrice Society was one of numerous feminine congregations founded in
France. The Society was begun by Emilie d’Oultremont (Mother Mary of Jesus) with the
assistance of the Jesuit, Fr Petit. Mother d’Oultremont reminded her Sisters: “You all know
that it is to the Society of Jesus that our little Society owes its existence...” The aim of the
new Society was outlined thus by their foundress: “...Our Lord, in His merciful love has
called (us) to a life of atonement...” The Society was categorised as one of mixed life,
having some works outside the confines of the convent, mainly catechism classes and retreats
for women. Expressing the attitudes the Sisters should have, Mother d’Oultremont wrote:
“A Marie Reparatrice nun must have a constant willingness for suffering, interior penance,
poverty, the strictest and blindest obedience and a continual renunciation in all things...”

The foundress of the Reparatrice Sisters wrote as part of her founding plan:

Wherever Christ is ignored or outraged
in His suffering and humiliated members
there we find a place for Reparation.

Reparation was also to be made for the profanations against the Eucharist in those times. The
religious life of the Reparatrice Sisters was to have the “double dimension of adoration and
announcement of the Word.” Marian devotions were of special importance, and the
spirituality was mainly Ignatian, as the Society was under the protection of the Jesuit Order,
although the Foundress was guided by Fr Semenenko, a Resurrectionist priest.

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21 Confidential Letter of Helene to her spiritual director, Fr Raphael Delarbre, OFM, General Archives of
the FMM, Rome, in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 71.
22 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 53.
23 Letter of Mother Mary of Jesus, 2 July 1862, in ‘Regles de la Societe de Marie Reparatrice,’ 1873,
Archives, Ootacamund, India, cited in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 71.
24 Mother Mary of Jesus, quoted by Launay in Helene de Chappotin, 73.
25 Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 73.
26 Mother Mary of Jesus, quoted in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 73.
28 Ibid.
29 Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 71.
Helene entered in 1864, and upon taking the habit Helene received the name of *Mary of the Passion.*

It was during her eleven years as a Reparatrice Sister that Helene had prolonged interaction with the Jesuits and the Ignatian rule, developing a deep appreciation for this spirituality. This can be seen reflected in many aspects of the religious practices that she later passed on to her Sisters, particularly the special dedication and concern for the Pope. Helene’s desire for her Institute was to have a fourth vow of obedience to the Pope as do the Jesuits, but it was refused by the Vatican authorities.

*The Reparatrice Sisters in India*

The Society of Marie Repartrice had only been in existence for two years when in 1860 Mother d’Oultremont was asked by the Jesuits to make a foundation in their jurisdiction of Madurai in southern India. The purpose for this move outside of Europe was the formation of Indian religious women in the two local religious communities founded by the Jesuits. The Sisters took on this role, while continuing their own charism of the spiritual care of women and girls.

As the Jesuit Michael Amaladoss pointed out, India is a multi-religious country: “Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism had their origin here. Christianity has been present in India from the time of St. Thomas the Apostle, according to a strong tradition.” The encounter with religions so different from Christianity was to have a profound effect upon Helene.

According to ancient tradition, Mylapore on the west coast of India was evangelised by the apostle, Thomas. In 1498 the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived on the western coast of India. It was after this that the Portuguese established their power there. Portuguese Franciscan Friars began evangelising there. An Indian Franciscan Brother was the first Indian

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30 Quoted in Sr Anne de la Bouliere FMM, *Living Our Name: Our Spiritual Family,* 6.
31 Permission for this was refused. Cf. Chapter Three.
33 Michael Amaladoss, “Interreligious Dialogue 50 Years After Vatican II Challenges and Opportunities” in Sedos Bulletin (Vol. 47, No. 9/10 – 2015), 206. Sedos an international organization based in Rome, for the “Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission...It is a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of global mission.” An initiative of the Divine Word Missions, the FMM have been members since its inauguration in 1964.
34 Cf. below, “Helene in India.”
to be canonised as a saint. He was one of the twenty-six martyrs of Japan, who were executed by crucifixion on 5 February, 1597, at Nagasaki.\(^{35}\) The mission at Madurai, however, had its roots in the sixteenth century when the Spanish Jesuit, St Francis Xavier, went to India, and worked in the south, setting up communities in that area.\(^{36}\)

In 1853 the Indian Law forbidding people to change their religion was abolished.\(^{37}\) This allowed for conversions from Hinduism to Christianity, although this law would be challenged repeatedly by Hindus who considered that to be born Indian was to be Hindu.\(^{38}\)

Early Jesuit missionaries had adapted the Catholic liturgy to the culture and practices of the Indian peoples. However, controversies over these Jesuit-inspired liturgies called the ‘Malabar Rites’, led to the banning of these Rites in 1759 in all Portuguese territories. In 1764 the Jesuits themselves were expelled from France, and then in 1767 from all Spanish controlled areas. Finally, the Jesuits were dissolved by Pope Clement XIV in 1773.\(^{39}\) As they had been the most active missionary Order at that time in India, their loss was a severe blow to the missions. They did not return to India until 1837. Jesuit missionaries had only returned to Madurai a short time before the arrival of the Reparatrice Sisters in 1860.\(^{40}\)

At the time of the arrival of the Marie Reparatrice Sisters, India was entirely under the control of the British. There had been a failed Indian uprising against the British in 1858, only two years before the sisters arrived.\(^{41}\) The social situation in which the Sisters found themselves – the extreme poverty of the people, the neglected and very low status of women and children - led them to open new works previously not adopted in the Society.


\(^{37}\) Cf Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 81.

\(^{38}\) Cf. “Outlines of Hindu Fundamentalism” (author not named) http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/hindufund.htm (accessed 8 October, 2013). This conflict continues even to today.


Three Reparatrice houses were set up within the first four years in India, one in Trichinopoly where the apostolic vicar resided; one at Tuticorin on the southern coast, and another in Adeikalabouram, a sandy desert area. There was already a Christian village in this latter place with an orphanage and an agricultural college. These houses were very distant from each other, and it took “several days to journey from Trichinopoly in the north to the other two houses in the south, and a day from Tuticorin to Adeikalabouram. These were journeys by oxcart…”

Many of the Sisters had not even pronounced their perpetual vows, which proved that they had little experience of religious life. The strain of this radical change in their lives, plus the oppressive heat of southern India during the summer months, took its toll on the health of the new arrivals. Despite these difficulties, the Sisters learnt the local language, Tamil, but this was an added burden for those Sisters who did not already know English, as English was widely used as the language required to relate with the local authorities. The arrival of the European Sisters caused some concern amongst a number of the Jesuits on the mission there. One of the missionaries expressed his apprehension as follows:

…to embrace a kind of life that was completely different from that which the nature of their Institute had promised them in France…Instead of being sisters making reparation in the shadow of their cloister, here they became sisters of charity in our hospitals and teachers in our schools….by reason of their contemplative vocation, the sisters would be little suited to render the services that were expected of them.

From the above remarks, it can be seen that the Sisters expanded their outreach beyond the formation of the local religious women, and the spiritual care of women and children to include responding to anyone in need where possible.

**Helene in India**

Helene was sent to India, sailing from Marseilles on 19 March, 1865, before completing her novitiate. She arrived at Trichinopoly on 21 April, and set about learning Tamil, the language spoken mostly in southern India, and at which she became very proficient. In that distant, non-

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42 From an unpublished document of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, “Mary of the Passion in India.”
43 J. Bertrand, quoted in Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 86.
44 Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 76.
Christian country, she discovered the utter destitution of so many of the people, a depth of poverty she had never previously encountered, and a religion that was a new revelation to her. The sight of so many women and children in such dire need had a profound experience on her. Helene learnt of the Indian Caste system, an ancient practice of a hierarchy within the society, based on one’s birth:

It is described as a hierarchy of four varnas - or caste categories - found in Hindu scriptures, with brahmims (priests and teachers) at the top, followed by kshatriyas (rulers and soldiers), vaishyas (merchants and traders) and the shudras (labourers and artisans). Beneath them all are the dalits - so-called "untouchables" - who are completely excluded from society.\(^45\)

The effect of the Indian Caste system, which maintained many people in sub-human conditions, led her to her desire to spread the love of God to everyone, everywhere, regardless of religious, gender or social status.

Helene pronounced her first vows on 3 May, 1866, and in August was named Superior of the house in Tuticorin.\(^46\) The Jesuit in charge of the mission, Fr Cabos, praised Helene’s approach to her role as superior at Tuticorin:

I have the conviction that the Divine Master very generously illumines her soul and no doubt this is what gives her the expert eye that she has in her government, an eye which is so sure, so clear...All her actions are subjected to the examination of cold reason and she discusses matters with a calmness, a lucidity and a precision of reasoning that astonish me.\(^47\)

Helene was so loved by the people of Tuticorin that she was affectionately called Passion Tayar which is Tamil for ‘Mother Passion.’ This fond attachment to Helene endured long after she had left India, as related by two Sisters of the new Institute who arrived at Tuticorin some 20 years later. The people, recognising them as daughters of Passion Tayar, “ran to their bullock cart, detached the bull and drew the simple religious, deeply moved and embarrassed, through the town.”\(^48\)

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\(^46\) Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 90.

\(^47\) Letter of 13 September, 1867, to the Superior General of the Reparatrice Society, quoted in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 91.

\(^48\) Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 71.
In 1866 the health of the then Provincial, Marie de Saint Joseph, had deteriorated and she was recalled to Europe. The following year Helene was named to replace her, taking over the responsibility for the three Madurai communities of the Reparatrice Sisters.  

Upon taking on this responsibility of Provincial, Helene consecrated the three houses in honour of the Holy Family. Helene offered herself again for the Pope, “...to God to break Peter’s chains, and I persuaded my daughters to offer me, too, for the same purpose.” Helene did not pronounce her perpetual vows until four years later, in 1871.

In 1870 Helene’s spiritual attraction to the ‘shadow of Nazareth’ led her to make a private vow “always to honour the hidden life of Mary, especially at Nazareth, in order to obtain the triumph of the Church and of the Truth.” This reference to the word ‘truth’ reflected her suffering which had resulted from the anti-Catholic stance of the French government. The French government had taken over education, dissolving Catholic schools. This offering of herself as a victim recalls Helene’s experience in the Poor Clare chapel many years earlier in 1861, when she heard the words: “Are you willing to be crucified in place of the Holy Father?”

Helene also set about regulating the religious life of the Sisters of both the Reparatrice Society and the local Congregations. She had found that there were “untimely interventions of the confessor into the house.” There was also no regular prayer life in the houses. Gradually Helene introduced order into the convents and the cloister was strictly observed again, improving the religious life of the Sisters. Helene prepared a ‘Customs Manual of the Mission’ to assist the adaptation to the life in India, so different from the Sisters’ experiences in Europe. Helene explained that this Manual was necessary “to have precise rules concerning certain practices proper to the country.” The Manual also regulated the liturgical hours and re-

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50 Helene de Chappotin, in *Mary of the Passion*, 70.
52 Cf. Chapter Three, “Establishing the First Novitiate.”
53 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 46.
54 In Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 91.
introduced silence within the convents. This Manual was later approved by the Superior General.56

As those who witnessed these changes were to attest, it was a complete reformation.57 “Her method was simple and resembled the modern phrase: see, judge, act.” 58 Bringing together all her councillors as soon as she could, the new Provincial examined the situation of the communities with them, discerned the weak points and proposed some concrete remedies to be applied, little by little, such as regular prayer times and the silence within the convent.59 One of the Sisters who had lived through this renewal wrote that “in less than six months the provincial established peace in our hearts and union in our communities in India.”60

The works of the Reparatrice Sisters were greatly expanded under Helene’s guidance. Within one year of being named Provincial, Helene had opened a European boarding school, a free bilingual Tamil and English school, and two orphanages. Going beyond the accepted works for religious at that time, Helene began a factory which provided income for the employees and thus benefitted the local people.61 Retreats for women and girls, catechetics, dispensaries, schools, and printing presses were also started. Workshops were opened for the women to learn trades so that they could earn some income for themselves.62

The English Governor of the area at that time, Lord Napier, was so impressed with the work of the Sisters that he made donations of money to them so that they could continue the works. During one of his visits to the mission station Lord Napier described the medical centre the Sisters were running as “the best run in India.”63 Addressing Helene, he said: “My religion, Madam, forbids me to make vows; however, for the first time I feel tempted to make one: that of helping you in these enterprises that you understand far better than we do.”64 On another occasion the Governor came with a further large donation for the works.65

56 From “Minutes of the Council of the Mission of the Reparatrices of Madure”, 27 August, 1867, quoted in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 93. Upon seeing the value of such a guide, Helene repeated this work after founding her own Institute.

57 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, quoted in Alini and Foujols, An Apostle Sent by God. 11.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.


61 Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 11.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 98.

64 Ibid.

65 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 67.
The Sisters grew and weaved cotton, making cloths, saris, and sheets. Another orphanage and a boarding school were started. The ministry of the Jesuits and the Reparatrice Sisters in Madurai was seen as extensive as some statistics showed:

The zeal of the Jesuit Fathers and of the Religious of Madurai left no category and no age group unreached. The catechumens were carefully instructed, the widows gathered into pious congregations or trained as baptisers; the First Communion catechism classes were followed most zealously; retreats and preparation for the sacraments did an incalculable amount of good, the dispensaries were always full...During the year 1874 more than ten thousand sick people were treated, the number of schools increased, the Fathers gave more than thirteen retreats to groups of people, the sisters prepared 24,712 persons for the reception of the sacraments and in the three chapels 25,876 Communions were distributed.67

Yet the relationship with some Jesuits on the mission led to serious disagreements between the priests and the Sisters.

Conflicts between the Marie Reparatrice Sisters and the Jesuits in India

While the Reparatrice Sisters had been invited to Madurai by the Jesuits, some of the Jesuits there resented having women working with them; others expressed concern that the women were ill-adapted to the conditions: “…by reason of their contemplative vocation, the Sisters would be little suited to render the services that were expected of them.”68

Trouble between the Jesuits and the Sisters continued fermenting for a while. One of the main issues for the tension was the choice of confessors for the Sisters, and also of their supervision of the two local Congregations. These Indian women’s Congregations were founded to teach children.69 The Sisters of these two local Congregations found it difficult to adjust to the discipline and rules of life of the European Sisters, despite the patience, goodness and example given by the Reparatrice Sisters. The situation was made more problematic as some of the Jesuits did not wish to hand over responsibility for the local Sisters to the Reparatrice Sisters.

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66 Ibid., 64.
67 Ibid., 76.
Some covertly, and at times openly, encouraged the local Congregations to rebel and to become autonomous Congregations. One Jesuit even suggested to the Indian Sisters that they establish other convents in a different part of the Vicariate.70

One view of the outcome of this difficult situation was recorded in a volume on the history of Christianity in Tamilnadu, a large area in southern India:

The supervision of the European Sisters over the Indian auxiliaries led to a conflict of the European Sisters with the Fathers in 1868 to 1875, after which in 1876 the congregation of the Indian women...was reorganised under the Jesuit Apostolic Delegate and in 1881 all European Sisters were called back. One of the reasons was the incompatibility of the contemplative vocation of the Reparatrices, the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, with the aim for which they had been called to India, namely social and educational work, primarily the training of Indian nuns to become teachers.71

The author continued: “This affair must be considered an interlude of decline in the development of new and indigenous women orders.”72 The ministry of formation of a local Order of women was a heavy burden for the European Sisters as most of them had not been long in religious life themselves and had little or no knowledge of the Indian culture. Yet it was also obvious that European men could not effectively direct the Indian women. Helene, as Provincial, explained this difficulty “as a heavy cross.”73

Tensions developed over the boundaries of each group’s authority - that of the ecclesiastical superiors, the confessors and the Sisters themselves. Some Sisters expressed anxiety due to the pressure at times from their confessor to go against their consciences. There was also the problem of the Sisters having the same person as their confessor and co-worker. The Sisters wanted a confessor who was not living on the same mission and was not a co-worker. They also complained of the imposition on them of a heavy-handed and excessive male control over their activities.74

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70 Cf. Ibid., 225.
72 Ibid., 125.
73 Helene de Chappotin, recounted in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 95.
Helene wrote to her Superior General, Mother d’Oultremont, expressing her deep concern for the Sisters and their relationship with their confessor:

The result of this, Very Reverend Mother, is that out of a great number of missionaries, you will only find very few who can possibly be chaplains and confessors in women’s convents, and there are those who could make pure souls run into real dangers...  

There were visits to the convents at inappropriate times by the then Jesuit superior and confessor, Fr du Rochely. One of his fellow Jesuits described his relationship with the Sisters as “lacking tact, discretion and prudence.” Helene put a stop to these intrusions. In each of the three houses she arranged to have a parlour built, thus retaining the inner sanctum for the Sisters.  

Adding to the above difficult situation, in 1872 an Italian Jesuit T.A. Gallo, who had spent some time in Madurai, wrote a four-volume work on cases of troubled consciences between confessors and the religious women in their care. Whilst these volumes used false names, they were clearly seen as portraying the Reparatrice Sisters and Jesuits in Madurai. The Reparatrice Sisters were depicted as “intransigent and authoritarian.” The book also stated that it was “intolerable” that the Sisters give their opinion about the choice of their confessor. One of the Jesuits, Fr. Castanier, “undertook to spread among the Christians of Trichinopoly the news that the book... justifies the revolt of the native Sisters and the support given to them by some priests.”  

A Jesuit in Europe who had read the books wrote to the Jesuit Superior of the mission, Fr Cabos, saying: “I have never been able to understand how a book like that was allowed to be printed without first being examined in the Mission, since it is only in the Mission that things proper and particular to the Mission and to India can be judged.”

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76 H. de Gensac, Presentation historique de la Societe de Marie Reparatrice, quoted by Launay in Helene de Chappotin, 91.  
79 Quoted by Launay in his book, Helene de Chappotin, 103.  
81 In a Letter from Fr Louis Sain-Cyr to Fr Cabos, 5 April, 1873, cited in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 102.
Vatican Intervention Requested

Two years later in 1874 resentments and misunderstandings between the Reparatrice Sisters and some of the Jesuits in the mission became so serious that Helene, as Provincial, requested a mediator from the Vatican to investigate the situation. Petitions had also been sent to the Reparatrice Superior General and the Jesuit General in Rome asking for intervention in the matter.

Eventually a Visitor was sent to the Mission, but this man was also a Jesuit, a German, Fr Lessmann. Fr Lessmann rejected the Sisters’ request to have the book withdrawn, and also repeated the idea that it was intolerable that the Sisters were giving their own opinions as to the choice of confessor.82 Mother Marie de Saint Jean-Baptist, councillor of the mission, had complained of qualms of conscience which she and the members of the community were subjected to by Fr. L. Verdier, SJ. One of the priests stated that Fr Lessmann “did not conceal even from the Indians his ill will against the Religious, without justifying his unfavorable opinion with facts in their regard but only with a general impression.”83 One accusation made by Fr Lessmann was that the Sisters were substituting “themselves for the priests in the preaching of the gospel, with the ambition of governing the mission.”84 Fr Lessmann also forbade the Sisters “to give any instruction to groups of women, even if it was the most elementary.”85 The very charism of the Reparatrice Sisters, however, as seen earlier, after the contemplative aspect of their life, was the religious education of women and children.

At this time one of the Jesuit priests on the mission who supported the Sisters’ endeavours in the mission, the superior at Trichinopoly, Fr Cabos, SJ, was suddenly transferred to a very distant area by the Visitor, Fr Lessmann. In doing this Fr Lessmann overstepped his authority as Visitor.86 Fr Lessmann even proposed Fr Gallo, the author of the defamatory book, as

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83 Quoted in the paper, “The Servant of God in India.”
85 Ibid., 105.
86 Cf. Doc. VI: Missionnaire en Inde, 1873-1876, in Positio Super Virtutibus, Vol I, 321, 322. Fr Lessmann was the visitor and therefore had no authority over the appointment or removal of any of the missionary personnel. Fr Cabos was expelled from the Jesuit Society following the accusations of improper conduct with Helene. He was laicised and died in 1902 (Cf. footnote 71.) Four other Jesuits were also removed from the mission due to their “attachement fanatique...” to the Reparatrice. Ibid., 360.
confessor to the Sisters. This suggestion was openly confrontational to the Sisters. Fr Lessmann rejected the request of the Reparatrice Sisters to recall the book from the mission, declaring he did not find Fr. T. Gallo guilty of formal calumny. He also refused Helene’s request to publish, at the expense of the Society, a second edition without the offensive subject matter against the Reparatrice.\textsuperscript{87}

The Foundress of the Reparatrice, Mother d’Oultremont, seeing no solution to the conflict, finally wrote to the Cardinal in charge of \textit{Propaganda}\textsuperscript{88} on 13 August 1874, expressing her decision to withdraw from India:

\begin{quote}
I have waited for a long time, hoping I would receive help from Propaganda Fide, and trusting in the good promises of your eminence. I have not seen any of those promises fulfilled; on the contrary, persecution has increased, since Father Cabos, the support and defender of my daughters, has just been sent to a faraway area of Madurai so that no communication with him can be possible.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

The Superior General of the Reparatrice then sent three telegrams to the Sisters in Madurai ordering them to leave the mission. These telegrams, however, were contrary to a telegram which the Sisters received at about the same time from Cardinal Franchi of \textit{Propaganda} advising them to wait for the decision of the pope in the matter. Finally, another telegram arrived from the Superior General advising them to wait. These conflicting orders only added to the distress and confusion of the Sisters.\textsuperscript{90}

Subsequently, two Jesuits were appointed to the mission to serve as intermediaries in an attempt to reconcile the two groups. These two were to be agreeable with the Sisters, yet one of them, Mgr Canoz, had previously requested the removal of the Sisters from the mission. This left the Sisters very uneasy with the decision.\textsuperscript{91}

The question remained, however, of the work of the Sisters – the religious education of women to which many of the Jesuits on the mission objected. Mother d’Oultremont asked the Sisters

\begin{footnotes}
\item[87] Quoted in “The Servant of God in India.”
\item[88] \textit{Propaganda Fide} is the Vatican department responsible for all mission territories. Henceforth it will be referred to as “\textit{Propaganda}.”
\item[90] Copies of these letters are reprinted in \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus} Vol. I, 391-393.
\end{footnotes}
to put in writing whether they wished to stay or to leave the mission. In a joint letter, their replies were unanimous; although they were suffering they all wished to remain, “cost what it may.”

_A Foundation Outside of Jesuit Madurai Jurisdiction_

In 1874 Helene accepted a request from Mgr Bardou of the Paris Foreign Mission Society to open a house in the mountains at Ootacamund, in a neighbouring diocese, north of Madurai. As it was cooler in this mountainous region, it coincided with Helene’s desire for a place where the Sisters could go to rest and recuperate from the oppressive heat of the plains area. Also, owing to the worsening situation in Madurai, Helene foresaw Ootacamund as a place to seek refuge if she were forced to leave the Madurai mission, as this mission at Ootacamund was beyond the Jesuit jurisdiction.

Ootacamund was 7,378 feet above sea level and the British residents referred to it as the “Queen of Hill Stations.” The original tribal inhabitants, the Todas, were, according to historian Stephen Neill, “the smallest of all races,” when the first contact was made with them by the British. At that time they numbered only about 1,000 and were buffalo herders, but were deceived into handing over their land to the British, who proceeded to establish a very English village there.

The Sisters who were assigned to Ootacamund and had not learnt English and Tamil set about studying these languages. Almost as soon as they had arrived, women began bringing their children to them. The Sisters set up a clinic as soon as they could, and schools, one for Tamil speaking students and another for English pupils. From the beginning of the new foundation, relationships with the Protestant community already present were good. According to Mgr

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92 Letter of 8 August, cited in Launay, _Helene de Chappotin_, 111.
93 In _Mary of the Passion_, 74.
94 Cf. Launay, _Helene de Chappotin_, 109. In the Sisters’ publication, _Mary of the Passion_, there are very few references about the mission in Ootacamund, and no reference is made to the matter of their consciences for the departure of Helene and the other Sisters who also left. The information regarding the separation had been withheld until the beatification of Helene in 2002.
97 Panter-Downes, _Ooty Preserved_.
98 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, _For the Mission and Its Risks_, 257, 258.
Bardou, Helene’s respect for persons, her gift for human contacts, won for her in Ootacamund the esteem of Protestants which dissipated prejudices and facilitated the relationships of the missionaries with them.99 This was clearly demonstrated when the Sisters were trying to purchase a property on an adjacent site, but with insufficient funds. A Protestant gentleman, seeing their plight, “went that very night, in pouring rain to draw money from the bank and take it to the Sisters.”100

The added responsibilities as Provincial took their toll on Helene who suffered greatly from the heat and from physical ailments: “…she also suffered from heart attacks which left her dying and ice-cold under a burning sun, terrible diphtheria and the pain of dropsy…”101 Helene herself rarely spoke of the repeated attacks of pain and vomiting which left her utterly exhausted but she continued to fulfil her duties.102

In 1875, in recognition of Helene’s talents, Fr Semenenko, the spiritual director of the Foundress of the Reparatrice, Mother d’Oultremont, wrote in praise of Helene to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda: “Your Eminence, for me she is a very superior person who is outstanding as a good religious, as a good superior and as an exteriorly capable woman. I also believe that she is very holy.”103

Many others would later appreciate Helene’s ability to manage institutions and to see matters clearly and dispassionately, in particular her spiritual director, the Franciscan, Friar Raphael, and the then Franciscan Minister General, Friar Bernardino. This clear-sightedness and candour is evident from the many women who were attracted to join her within a short time of the foundation of her new Congregation.104

99 Quoted in For the Mission and Its Risks, 21.
100 Ibid., 257.
101 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 68.
102 Ibid.
103 Cited in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 112.
104 Cf. the following Chapter.
Helene is Replaced as Provincial

Helene continued to be vilified and eventually Mother d’Oultremont, believing the defamatory reports about Helene made by certain Jesuits, had her replaced as Provincial Superior. Helene was then sent to the community in Ootacamund.

The Sister chosen to replace Helene as Provincial was one of the Sisters from the original group to arrive in India. This Sister had previously accused Helene of abusing her authority and of the lack of a spirit of reconciliation and peace. Many of the Sisters in the community knew of this Sister’s antagonism toward Helene and described the character of the new Provincial as “jealous, with poor regard for poverty and obedience…” The Sisters did not support the decision to replace Helene and complained to the Superior General. However, in her return letter, the Superior General gave the Sisters an ultimatum: “…if you do not agree to that, you are all free to leave, but to return to your families and not to the society…”

In the same letter the Superior General accused Helene of being at the bottom of “this movement of uprising.”

In Ootacamund some of the Sisters informed Mgr Bardou of the unjust treatment and false accusations against Helene by the new Provincial. Besides the accusations mentioned above, the new Provincial falsely accused Helene before the English Governor of misappropriation of the funds of the orphanage at Trichinopoly, and of taking the money to Ootacamund. The English government’s Director of the Public Instruction himself showed in an official document the inaccuracy of the accusation.

Mgr Bardou, although he had initially been reluctant to become involved in the situation in Madurai, now wrote two letters. Following advice from two members of his own Order who were concerned for the Sisters, he wrote to Pope Pius IX, and to the Cardinal in charge of Propaganda, saying that the position of the religious in Madurai was untenable. In this letter Mgr Bardou also expressed his disapproval of the behaviour of the new provincial, and asked that the community of Reparatrice in Ootacamund be separated from her authority and that of

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106 Ibid., 348.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., 345.
110 Frs F Tiquet and H Lefeurvre, MEP. Cf. Ibid., 353.
111 Ibid.
her Councillor. He also requested that a serious, independent and impartial examination of the situation in Madurai be carried out.\textsuperscript{112} He commented to the Sisters regarding Mother d’Oultremont that “…it really seems that your mother is pushing you to a separation.”\textsuperscript{113}

In her letter of 1 April 1876, Mother d’Oultremont advised the Sisters in India that a Visitator, Sister Marie de Sainte-Anne, would be sent to Madurai to investigate the situation, “with full powers.”\textsuperscript{114} This meant: “Absolute silence is imposed upon you by the pope, the cardinal and me…”\textsuperscript{115} Because of this injunction, Helene did not hear of all the accusations made against her until six years later in 1883.\textsuperscript{116} Before the visit was to begin officially, the Visitator called the Sisters of the three Madurai convents together, and gave them a series of talks. Helene was not present at these conferences as she had been too ill to travel down the mountain from Ootacamund.\textsuperscript{117} During these talks, Marie de Sainte-Anne repeatedly accused Helene of serious moral misconduct with the Superior Fr Cabos, and with disobedience, rebellion and false mysticism.\textsuperscript{118} The Sisters present at these talks quickly responded that, on the contrary, they could not agree with these accusations as they were with Helene most of the day and night. As Helene was frequently quite ill, one of the Sisters slept in a small room opening onto Helene’s room in case she needed assistance during the night. Also, the other Sisters said that during the day, Helene was always with another Sister. The Sisters continued, declaring that they could not praise Helene and Fr Cabos enough.\textsuperscript{119}

The Visitator refused to listen to any explanations, and the Sisters were given an ultimatum: subscribe to these allegations or leave the Society.\textsuperscript{120} The Sisters wrote to their Superior General telling her that they could not agree with the allegations. Over the following days twenty Sisters made the painful decision to leave the Society rather than go against their conscience.\textsuperscript{121}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 358.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 357.
\textsuperscript{116} Cf. Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{117} Helene and the Community arranged for the Bishop to send a letter explaining Helene’s inability to travel due to ill-health.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 367.
\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Summarium: in Positio Super Virtutibus, Vol. I, LXX. Later, one Sister changed her mind and returned to the Reparatrice Society.
\end{flushleft}
The Sisters in Madurai asked the Visitator for the fare for the bullock ride to Ootacamund as they hoped to receive a welcome from the Bishop there. The Visitator told them that they had to travel at their own expense. The Sisters’ only recourse was to borrow the cost of the ride from “an English Protestant.”

Later, in a letter to Cardinal Franchi of Propaganda, some of the Sisters wrote regarding the Visitator: “On her arrival, in open conference, Reverend Mother Marie de Sainte-Anne presented some accusations which were easy to disprove.”

Hearing of these accusations against himself and Helene, Fr Cabos responded saying that he firmly asserted Helene’s virtues and defied the slanderer to explain himself “before the courts.” Instead of being given a just hearing, Fr Cabos was dismissed from the Jesuit Order in September, 1876, for “serious compromises of honour.” The Sisters only heard of this in October, 1876, noting in their house journal that he had been accused of “being responsible for the separation.”

Cabos continued to serve as a priest in the Bordeaux diocese in France until his death in 1902. His name was never cleared.

**Departure from the Marie Reparatrice Society**

Helene was already living in Ootacamund in a neighbouring diocese in a convent which did not belong to the Reparatrice, but to Mgr Bardou. The bishop was aware of the conflict between the Reparatrice and the Jesuits, and welcomed Helene and the Sisters to remain in his Diocese saying: “It would be cruel to leave European women on the street, and all the more so

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122 In the notes of Sr Marie du Saint-Esprit 29 May to 9 June, 1876, quoted in Doc. VI: Missionnaire en Inde, 1873-1876, Positio Super Virtutibus Vol I, 368.
in a pagan and protestant country.' 129 In a letter to his religious superior, Mgr Bardou also spoke of the risk of scandal to the local people and to the Protestant community in Ootacamund, and to the esteem in which the Sisters are held: “The ladies of the Governor and the other officers go frequently to visit the Religious, several assist in the Office, fifty ladies are boarders, etc. etc.” 130

The Cardinal in charge of Propaganda asked Mgr Bardou for his opinion of the situation, for he was thinking of demanding that the Sisters either return to the Reparatrice Society or leave religious life altogether. However, Mgr Bardou replied that “…not only will Your Eminence not blame them but, on the contrary, you will wish to regularise their position.” 131 Mgr Bardou knew Helene well from the time she had opened the convent in his diocese. On an earlier occasion, in 1874, he had written to the Reparatrice Superior General referring to Helene: “The Mother Provincial especially is very knowledgeable in business matters and is remarkably pious…” 132

On 19 June, in a joint letter to the Superior General of the Reparatrice, the Sisters who had left the Society wrote that “our conscience bears testimony that we have spoken nothing but the truth.” 133 The Sisters made it clear that they would have left the Reparatrice Society even if Helene had not, for they would not go against their consciences. However, they also said that they would not have begun a new Institute; rather, they would have returned to their families. “Without her we would have left the Society of Marie Reparatrice, we would never have had the courage to start an institute, especially in such circumstances…” 134

In August 1876 Bishop Bardou received a letter from Propaganda saying that Helene should go to Rome to explain the situation. The bishop was also asked in the same letter to write to

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129 Ibid., 117.
each of the Sisters inviting them to return to the Reparatrice Society. Each one replied personally, declining the invitation.\textsuperscript{135}

Helene decided that, after responding to the request from \textit{Propaganda} to explain the situation, she would go to the Pope himself to seek approval to found a new Institute under the care of the bishop in Ootacamund. The decision to begin a new Institute was not taken easily by Helene. She expressed her dilemma saying: “How strongly I was tempted to disappear, to slip away from the cross, to free Mary Victim from her agony! Only one idea made me hesitate – the thought of my daughters! Before Jesus I felt free. But before these poor souls no, I could not feel free.”\textsuperscript{136} Years later, in 1901, she wrote:

\begin{quote}
I had never ever thought of founding…Sent back into the world with my companions, former Missionaries like myself, I went to meet Pius IX to request him to preserve the religious vocation of all of us. We were twenty in number, we had lived many years in the missions, we loved the mission, we knew them, and we desired to continue consecrating our lives to them.\textsuperscript{137}
\end{quote}

\textit{Departure from India}

On 21 November, 1876, Helene and three companions left for Rome. Helene herself would never return to her beloved India. One of the Sisters who remained behind in India was Marie du Baptiste Jean de Britto. Writing from India she shared with Helene the deep pain caused by the separation from the Reparatrice Society:

\begin{quote}
How can I forget the nocturnal flight from Adaikalapuram and the separation, our sorrows and humiliations of that time, and that agony, all the more painful and frightening because we did not know where we were going, such a thick veil obscured the Divine Will. We had to leave, to break with our religious life, that was as clear as day, but to break away from a holy religious family to whom we were bound by perpetual vows made with so much love, and why, Oh my God? Did we not have the right to ask heaven this Why? And how long it took for us to receive an answer from heaven! Who can tell the horrors of that night that lasted for years!!\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{136} Helene de Chappotin, in \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 77.
\textsuperscript{137} Helene de Chappotin, in Launay, \textit{Helene de Chappotin}, 121.
\textsuperscript{138} Letter of Marie du B Jean de Britto to Helene, 11 June, 1891, in \textit{The Foundresses}, 82.
Summary

The profound suffering brought about by the conflict between the Jesuits and the Reparatrice Sisters left a life-long mark on Helene and all the Sisters. The lies and calumny against Helene and the other Sisters led Helene to stress the utter importance of ‘truth and charity.’ These themes appear repeatedly in her later writings.

The life-changing experiences in India of the degrading poverty and the entrenched caste system, laid the foundation for the specific characteristics Helene would give to the new Institute to be founded. These experiences had opened her to a vast new world, and thus her vision was for a universal outreach of the Gospel, with no one being excluded.

Helene and her companions were the third group of women to leave the Marie Reparatrice Society within the first twenty years of its foundation. The first group which left was in Ireland in 1874; they became the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The visitator during this conflict was the same one sent to India during Helene’s time as Provincial. The second group was a number of novices in Spain who left in 1876 and became the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The discord between the Jesuits and the Reparatrice Sisters in India continued and the Reparatrice Sisters left India altogether in 1882 and have not returned.  

Throughout Helene’s life to this juncture there had been a number of changes of direction which demonstrate the Holy Spirit’s guidance: from a contemplative religious life with the Poor Clare Sisters, to a missionary sending to a foreign country in the Marie Reparatrice Society where she encountered utter poverty and the partition caused by the caste system.

Helene and the twenty other Sisters left the Society so as not to go against their consciences. Her future and that of those who left with her was very uncertain. However, the insights Helene gleaned from these sufferings and struggles with ecclesiastical authorities were an invaluable aid when establishing the new Institute and writing the Constitutions for the new Religious community of their own. Thus, the Institute Helene would eventually establish

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would be blessed with aspects of both the Franciscan and Jesuit spiritualities. This is the subject of the following Chapter.

140 Cf. Chapter Three.
CHAPTER THREE

The Founding of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

Overview

Helene de Chappotin never intended to found a new religious Institute; however, she took on the task of consolidating the new group who had joined her into a community of religious women. Her eleven years in India had opened her eyes and heart to new cultures and religions. Thus, the new Institute would have a world-wide outreach to proclaim the love of God. Helene was the first woman to begin her own Congregation specifically dedicated to universal mission.

Whilst Helene’s deepest longing had been to live a life of prayerful seclusion as she had as a Poor Clare Sister, she wholeheartedly undertook her new responsibilities as an extension of her first call from God. The basic elements of Helene’s ideas for the new Institute were that Sisters would be Missionaries, Victims, and Adorers.

Eventually all the Sisters of this community would come under the umbrella of the Franciscan family by becoming members of the Third Order Regular of St Francis of Assisi.

The accusations and slander against Helene and the Sisters followed them from India to Europe. This had serious implications when they were seeking to establish themselves as a religious community. The Franciscan Friars were instrumental in resolving these difficulties.

The experience these Sisters had of religious life in India was very helpful in establishing the new Institute. These women acted as mentors to the new members, those who entered in India and those who joined the Institute in Europe.
Establishing the Institute

Initial Steps

When all the Paris Foreign Missionary priests at Ootacamund learnt of the situation of the separated Sisters, they unanimously urged Mgr Bardou to defend and protect them.¹ Thus, when leaving India, Helene went with the support of Mgr Bardou and the priests of the diocese. Mgr Bardou gave her a letter for Cardinal Franchi of Propaganda. The letter stated the reason for the Helene’s voyage: “…to explain the difficulties in which she and her companions find themselves.”² The presence of three companions was explained as an “implicit delegation to have the situation of the separated religious regularized.”³

The three Sisters who accompanied Helene from India to Rome were: Marie des Saints Anges, a Belgian, whom Helene affectionately called, “Zange;”⁴ had been Helene’s companion on her journeys in Madurai as Provincial;⁵ Marie Agnes de Saint Jean-Baptiste (called my Jean by Helene), and Marie du Coeur Immacule who was known as “the sensible one.”⁶ These three Sisters were close friends of Helene, and were also renowned for their missionary fervour. It is not recounted how they were chosen to go to Rome with her, but it is presumed that Helene chose them herself as they were very concerned for the future of the whole group.⁷

Marie du Coeur Immacule had joined her daughter Marie de Sainte Véronique⁸ in the Reparatrice Society after the death of her husband in 1873.⁹ When she left with Helene for Rome, Marie de Sainte Véronique took on the responsibility for the remainder of the group in Ootacamund. Marie du Coeur Immacule’s two sons, Albert and Paul de Guigne, who were returning to France following a trip, travelled to Rome to meet them.¹⁰

³ Ibid.
⁴ Alini and Foujols, FMM, “Marie des Saints Anges,” in *Our Foundresses*, 17.
⁵ Cf. Ibid., 29, 30.
⁶ Ibid., 3. No information was given for why these particular Sisters were chosen as companions. Cf. Doc. VII: *La Servante De Dieu Fondatrice*, 1876-181, Introd.: 3. Fondation de l’Institut (c), *Positio Super Virtutibus*, Vol I, 461.
⁸ Ibid., 6.
⁹ A second daughter who had also joined the Reparatrice Society died of cholera in 1870, the day after arriving in India. Cf. *Our Foundresses*, 6.
In Rome Helene was prevented from meeting with Cardinal Franchi of Propaganda after three attempts. This was due to pressure from Mother d'Oultremont and some Jesuits who had written to the Cardinal declaring that Helene and her companions were “disobedient and rebellious.”

Helene then realised that she would not be able to act on her own behalf. However, M. Marie du Coeur Immacule’s sons, Paul, a Papal Zouave, and his brother Albert, were able to obtain an audience with the pope, Pius IX [1846-1878]. During this audience they explained the situation of the Sisters. Thereupon the pope encouraged them to meet with Cardinal Franchi. At this first meeting with the Cardinal, Count d’Erceville, was also present. The Count was the father of one of the separated Sisters, M. Marie du Saint-Esprit, and had come to Rome to support his daughter.

On 3 January, 1877, the Cardinal Franchi gave orders that the house in Ootacamund be closed as a convent of the Reparatrice. He then advised the de Guigne brothers to meet with Fr Jean-Joseph Rousseille, Procurator in Rome of the Paris Foreign Missionaries. It was necessary to obtain official acknowledgement of the willingness of the Order to care for the religious at Ootacamund. This approval given, Paul de Guigne sent a telegram to Mgr Bardou advising him that he had the permission to found the Missionaries of Mary as a diocesan Institute. Upon receiving the telegram Mgr Bardou replied: “If Propaganda consents, I consent.”

The name Helene had chosen for the new Institute, ‘Missionaries of Mary’, reflected her deep devotion to Mary of Nazareth. In fact, at this time numerous new religious Orders and Institutes took the name of ‘Mary’, including many male Orders; for instance, the Marist Fathers, founded in Le Puy, France, in 1812; the Marist Brothers founded in Lavalla in France in 1817; the Little Brothers of Mary, and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, founded in 1826.

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15 Ibid. 3 (a).

16 Cf. Ibid.


18 Cf. Ibid., 3 b). Telegram of 5 January, 1877.
Helene immediately sent word to the Sisters in India by telegram that she would keep them informed of all decisions and eventualities regarding their future.\footnote{Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 124.} This included the continuation of the works in Ootacamund and the official organisation of the juridical structures of the new Institute.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Doc. VII: La Servante de Dieu: Fondatrice, 1876-1881, Introd.:} 5. Les Debuts de l’Institut, 5, in \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus}, Vol I, 467.}

In a letter to the Sisters at Ootacamund Helene referred to the suffering she had endured in India because of the opposition of many of the Jesuits and some of the Reparatrice.\footnote{Cf. The opposition of some Jesuits to the Sisters’ request to have some voice in the choice of their confessor, and accusations against them of disobedience and rebellion in Chapter Two.} Helene saw that her suffering was also causing pain to the Sisters who had left with her: “It has pleased Our Lord to make you suffer because of me, and equally it is His will to send me many crosses because of you.”\footnote{Quoted in \textit{Doc. VII: La Servante De Dieu Fondatrice, 1876-1881, Docum.:} 6. Élection de la Servante de Dieu, in \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus}, Vol I, 512, 513.} Helene added in the same letter: “I promised Our Lord that the support you have from me is more as a mother than as a superior.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The basis of Helene’s overwhelming influence in the establishment of the new Institute, besides the importance of prayer and a sound spirituality, was explained by one of the Sisters as follows:

- The witness of her own life
- The formation of the Sisters through her writings and personal contacts
- Her prior experience of missionary life and her ability to draw upon that experience
- Her judicious use of the collaboration of the former Marie Reparatrice Sisters who became the first group of Missionaries of Mary
- Her ability to collaborate with ecclesiastical authorities and a variety of men’s religious congregations as well as public figures
- Her clarity concerning the specificity of the Institute, and the appropriate juridical relationship with the Church’s authorities to safeguard that specificity.\footnote{Joan Bird, FMM, Paper, “The Missionary Vision of Mary of the Passion, Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in the light of the Church’s revisioning of Its Mission,” 9.}
**Interim “Plan” of the Institute**

In March 1877 Helene set about writing an interim document, called ‘The Plan,’ to guide the new Institute until the Constitutions could be written and approved. She based most of her Plan on the Plan\(^{25}\) of the Marie Reparatrice Congregation, and on her experience of the Poor Clare contemplative life. She also included many of the devotions and rules from both of these communities. During her time with the Poor Clares, Helene had experienced the gospel way of life of Saints Francis and Clare: the poverty, simplicity and contemplative aspects of religious life and the love for the Franciscan spirituality remained with her for the rest of her life.

As a Reparatrice Sister Helene’s world was opened to other cultures and religions. She loved the practice of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Helene explained that the colour of the habit was to be white, “because this is the colour of the Most Blessed Sacrament, that of Our Lady, and also that of the visible Head of the Church….and finally, white is the most suitable colour for the Missions.”\(^{26}\) Making acts of penance was another devotion Helene retained, as reparation for the “outrages committed against God by sin.”\(^{27}\) In fact, this theme in her Plan is often repeated in her letters to the Sisters, for instance: “With Jesus the Redeemer, with Mary His mother, a Missionary of Mary must be a victim of reparation contributing, as much as possible, to the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls.”\(^{28}\)

Helene followed the regulations of her day for Religious Congregations of having three degrees of Sisters in the Institute: “the choir Religious, the coadjutrix Sisters and the Sisters of Nazareth who keep the enclosure less strictly. Among these may be admitted persons who for one reason or another cannot be received in the first two degrees.”\(^{29}\) The choir Religious were usually the educated women, mostly of the upper class or of the nobility. They were given the title of ‘Mother.’ These women were the superiors and directors of the works. The women in the second degree were mainly uneducated or poorly educated women. Their title was ‘Sister.’ The Sisters of Nazareth were the women who were not subject to the restriction of the cloister, and went begging on behalf of the others. These women were also called ‘Sister.” They were similar

\(^{25}\) The Reparatrice included their Plan as part of their Constitutions; Helene replaced her Plan with the Constitutions, modifying it considerably following her entry into the Franciscan Order.
\(^{26}\) “The Plan,” #7, in Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 156.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., #4, 156.
\(^{28}\) In Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 124.
\(^{29}\) “The Plan,” #8.
to the ‘external’ Sisters of the enclosed Orders. Helene outlined the special ministry of the Sisters: “In Catholic countries, through retreats and the teaching of the catechism, the Institute would also be directed to missionary territories…”

The first paragraph of Helene’s Plan expressed the aim of the new community:

The aim of the Institute of the Religious Missionaries of Mary is to honour and to imitate the life of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in continuing, as far as possible, to further her action on earth.

Helene saw this action of Mary in giving birth to Jesus as giving Love Incarnate to the world. Helene made three significant changes to the Plan of the Reparatrice Society. Firstly, she added to the practice of making reparation that of offering oneself as a victim “for the Church and for souls.”

[Helene] invited her sisters to live the redemptive self-offering of a ‘victim’ in the biblical sense of the word, in order to make up, as St. Paul says, whatever is lacking in the passion of Christ for His Body, the Church…

The second modification to the Reparatrice Plan was that the emphasis on devotions to Mary would change from ‘Marie Reparatrice’ to ‘Mary of Nazareth.’ Helene wished the Sisters to imitate Mary in her hidden life at Nazareth, while retaining the aspects of ‘missionary’ and ‘victim’:

In consequence of their double vocation of Victims and Missionaries, they embrace the mixed life; and as it was without ostentation, especially at Nazareth, that the Immaculate Virgin cooperated more than any other creature in the salvation of humanity wrought by her divine Son, so also without ostentation, in charity, peace and humility, the Religious Missionaries of Mary must strive to become worthy of their mission and to accomplish it.

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., #1.
33 Cf. Ibid., #4.
34 Ibid.
36 Helene de Chappotin, “The Plan” #4,156.
Helene explained that the idea of this double vocation came from her upbringing as a royalist and a Catholic:

I used to say: “Oh, how happy I would be if I, too, could die for France and for my King!” and this was how I first got the idea of offering myself for the Church and for souls, especially when there was a question of offering oneself for the defense of the Papal States.  

Similar sentiments were expressed by other French women such as Euphrasie Barbier who founded the Institute of Our Lady of the Missions in 1861. Barbier wrote of the sad situation in France,

…when our souls are filled with profound sorrow and steeped in bitter grief at the sight of that satanic impiety, which, under all possible forms, perverts and ruins our dear France…blaspheming more than ever Your Holy Name, persecuting and pursuing with infernal hate, Your holy Spouse, the Church our other, and multiplies its incomparable and sacrilegious outrages against the Holy Eucharist…  

The third change Helene made was that the new Institute would be universal:

…her years in India, her fidelity to her conscience, and her loyalty to those who joined her in Ootacamund are concrete evidence of her growing consciousness of living this offering in the service of universal mission… (and)…the awareness of God’s infinite love for every person…

This universal missionary outreach was to “prefigure the plenitude of the Kingdom…” There were other missionary Congregations at this time, the Cluny Sisters, for instance, who were founded in 1807 for the education of children. Helene’s vision, however, was unique for, from the very beginning, her Institute would be universal and with community members of different nationalities. The Sisters would take account of the ‘signs of the times’ by responding to whatever needs they encountered.

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40 Alini and Foujols, in An Apostle Sent by God, VII.
41 Cf. J.B. Cullen (translator), Life of Venerable Mother Javouhey, Foundress of the Congregation of St Joseph of Cluny [1779-1851]. (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1912). “Anne-Marie Javouhey had a vision in which her cell appeared to be filled with a multitude of children of every race and colour…She heard a mysterious voice saying: ‘These are the little ones I confide to your care….” 38.
Establishing the First Novitiate

In December 1876, Cardinal Franchi advised Helene and the Sisters to go France to found a novitiate “to prepare new missionaries for India.” Mgr Bardou sent Helene a letter of recommendation to take with her for any bishop who might welcome them in France.

When Helene wished for a foundation of the Institute in France in 1877, there was still a deep anti-religious sentiment amongst the general population. The conflict between Catholic and Protestant was still very much an open wound, and suspicion was rife on both sides. As a result, many religious Orders were forced to disband or were expelled from France, including the Franciscan Friars in 1901.

Helene first went to Cardinal Donnet of Bordeaux in south-western France who initially welcomed the Sisters to his diocese. However, the Jesuit Provincial of Toulouse P. Blandchard, hearing of the request, advised Mother d’Oultremont in Rome of Helene’s movements. Mother d’Oultremont wrote to Cardinal Franchi, accusing Helene of being “insubordinate and rebellious…a dangerous woman…” Cardinal Franchi then put pressure on Cardinal Donnet not to accept the Sisters. Upon receiving this advice, Cardinal Donnet changed his mind and asked her to leave. The Cardinal explained that he did not wish to offend the Jesuits by having the presence of the Sisters in the same archdiocese.

After being rejected by this diocese, Helene approached Bishop David of St Brieuc, Brittany, her home province. At their first meeting Helene gave the bishop an account of her rejection in Bordeaux. He replied: “You carry your warrant in your face.”

46 Copies of these letters were also sent to the families of the Sisters who separated. Mother d’Oultremont also sent a copy of her letter to Propaganda. Cf. Doc. VII: La Servante De Dieu Fondatrice, 1876-1881, Introd.: 2. Période D’Attente 4, in Positio Super Virtutibus, Vol I, 453.
49 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 84.
The bishop in India, Bishop Bardou, had heard that Bishop David was very well-disposed toward the Sisters. He wrote to him suggesting that he take over the care of the Institute: “I am far from Rome and my correspondence is very slow…you will be in a better position to come to their defence and to make Rome more aware of the real state of things…” Bishop David welcomed the Sisters, as Helene recounted, “…with extraordinary charity and generosity.” He remained a constant guide and protector to the new Institute until his death on 27 July, 1882. He was replaced by Mgr Bouché who was also very favourable towards the Sisters.

While Helene and her three companions were establishing the Institute in Europe, the sixteen Sisters who remained in India continued their missionary life in the school and orphanage in Ootacamund.

Helene set up a novitiate in Brittany and many women joined the new Institute. Within four years there were 30 novices. Between 1877 and 1940, 422 joined from Brittany alone, sixty-two of them in the nine years between 1881 and 1890. It was soon necessary to move the novitiate to a larger property to accommodate the numerous vocations. The first group of five Sisters was sent from France to Coimbatore in India on 18 February, 1878, only thirteen months after the Foundation of the Institute. By sending them first to India, Helene wished the new members to learn from the years of missionary experience of those who had remained in India.

First General Chapter

In order to regulate the new Institute, Mgr Bardou called the first General Chapter, held on 25 April, 1877, in Ootacamund. This was to elect a Superior General. Mgr Bardou delegated his

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53 At the time of the separation there was a bilingual school (Tamil and English), two orphanages and a clinic in Ootacamund. Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 110.
54 Cf. Alini and Foujols, An Apostle Sent by God, 16.
55 From J. Michel, Missionnaires Bretons catholiques d’outre-mer, XIXe-XX3 siècle (Rennes, 1997), quoted in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 129.
57 Cf. Alini and Foujols, Our Foundresses, 15. (The Positio Super Virtutibus gives the date as the 19th.)
58 Cf. An Apostle Sent by God, 16.
vicar, Fr Laurent de Gélys, MEP, to preside over the process. Helene requested that for this first election, all the Sisters be permitted to vote, not just those who were professed as was the custom in religious communities at the time. Those who were not in India (e.g., the four Sisters in Paris) sent their votes in sealed envelopes. Helene was “unanimously elected, less one vote, her own.”

Financial Difficulties

The Sisters began their new lives in a very poor financial situation. The Reparatrice Sisters had refused to return the dowries of the Sisters who had separated from them. Added to this, there was a dispute over the ownership of the convent in Ootacamund. The Reparatrice foundation in Ootacamund had been made without any cost to the Society as Mother d’Oultremont had said that there was no money for it. The house was then bought with two loans. A small one was from a woman in Ootacamund, and the balance was from the Diocese. However, on 10 March, 1877, Mother d’Oultremont demanded compensation of 26,000 francs for the property. Mother Sainte Anne, the Reparatrice Assistant General in India, proposed that the property, which she valued at 33,200 francs, could serve as compensation for the dowries of the separated religious. The Sisters’ dowries, however, were valued at 58,200 francs. Little by little Helene reimbursed the Reparatrice from her own patrimony. On 8 March, 1878, Mgr Bardou officially declared that the house now belonged to the Missionaries of Mary.

In June 1882, wanting to finalise the issue over the dowries, and to begin the writing of the Constitutions, Helene travelled to Rome with two of her Councillors. Mgr David was very reluctant to permit Helene this trip due to her poor health, but finally agreed with her wishes. Letters of recommendation were given to Helene in order to have contacts in Rome. Fr Marie de Brest, the Procurator for the Franciscan Missions, also gave Helene a letter of

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62 Cf. Ibid., 481.
64 This Sister had been the Visitator to India who had accused Helene of indecent behaviour. Cf. Chapter Two.
recommendation addressed to the Minister General of the Friars Minor, Bernardino of Portogruaro.\textsuperscript{67}

To assist in making a correct application for the recovery of the dowries, and with the advice of her councillors, Helene had recourse to a lawyer, Domenico Pucci-Sisti.\textsuperscript{68} Helene gave the lawyer her account of the events leading to the separation, and he prepared the necessary documents for the case. In his file were copies of two letters accusing Mother d’Oultremont of responsibility for the separation. One of the letters was from Fr. Buisson SJ, a missionary in Madurai, to Frs. H Blanc and F. Cabos.\textsuperscript{69} The other letter was from Cardinal Desprez, Archbishop of Toulouse, to Mgr David.\textsuperscript{70} Following a breach of confidentiality, the contents of the file were made known to “a second party.”\textsuperscript{71} Despite strong objections on the part of the lawyer acting for the Sisters, these “very significant documents”\textsuperscript{72} were withdrawn from the file.\textsuperscript{73} The lawyer protested strongly to Cardinal Simeoni of Propaganda, and to Pope Leo XIII, but to no avail.\textsuperscript{74}

The decision regarding the dowries was finally made in April 1883 and went against the Missionaries of Mary. Helene and her Sisters were given a very small sum as compensation.\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{The Franciscan Affiliation}

Helene and her companions made contact with the Franciscan Friars soon after arriving in Rome and presented the letter of recommendation. During this initial visit to the Franciscans, the Sisters met one of the Assistants General, Friar Raphael Delarbre d’Aurillac [1843-1924]. He was to become Helene’s spiritual director and her strong support, along with the Minister General, Fr Bernardino del Vago da Portogruaro (Giuseppe dal Vago), [1822-1895]. Much later, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Institute, Helene wrote to the Sisters of Fr

\begin{footnotes}
\item[67] Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 94.
\item[68] This lawyer was called a concistorial lawyer at the time; today the title would be ‘canon lawyer’.
\item[70] Ibid., Footnote 110, 569.
\item[71] Ibid., d).
\item[72] Ibid.
\item[73] Ibid.
\item[74] Ibid.
\item[75] Cf. The decision was given on 18 June, 1883. Cf. \textit{Introd.: 8, Réhabilitation de la Servante de Dieu}, in \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus}, Vol I, 570. The amount was 13,832 francs.
\end{footnotes}
Raphael’s great support: “(Jesus)…gave me a Friar Minor after His Own Heart to guide me and to be my Cyrenian.”

Fr Raphael Delarbre was born in Aurillac, France, in 1843, and entered the Franciscans in 1862. In 1881 Fr Raphael was nominated as a Definitor of the Order, and with Fr Bernardino, strove for the union of the four Franciscan Orders. He was a spiritual guide to numerous communities of Poor Clare Sisters, and other Franciscan women’s communities. His personal journal contained daily notes written throughout his long religious life. In this journal are numerous brief references to the notes he wrote to Helene in his capacity as her spiritual director. Fr Raphael wrote 2,554 letters to Helene and 167 retreat programs. Helene wrote that it was Divine Providence that had prepared Fr Raphael for his invaluable assistance to her and to the Institute. Fr Raphael Delarbre wrote a life of St Jeanne d’Arc, which is testimony to the French origins of his faith. He died in France in 1924 and was buried in the Sisters’ chapel at Les Chatelets, France.

Fr Bernardino was born in Italy and took the Franciscan habit in 1839. He was appointed Minister General in 1869 and strove for the reform of the Order worldwide. He gave new impetus to missionary outreach among the Franciscans, opening friaries in numerous countries. He encouraged study, establishing the Colleges of the Antonianum in Rome and that of St. Bonaventure’s, Quaracchi near Florence. This college was for the formation of Franciscan professors and for the edition of works of writers of the Order. He also initiated a bulletin of information for the Order, Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum. He was instrumental in the union of the four groups of Franciscan Friars, although this was not achieved until after

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78 Ibid., 961.
79 Ibid., 961, 962.
80 Cf. Ibid., 962.
his death.\textsuperscript{86} With the broad experience he gained throughout his religious life, especially as Minister General, he was in a good position to guide Helene and the Sisters.

The missionary concern of Fr Bernardino was of great assistance to Helene, for he was of a similar mind. He maintained close contact with Helene, supporting and advising her on various matters. He was a valuable contact between Helene and the Vatican officials. Besides the support given to Helene by Fr Bernardino through the fifty-six letters to her, he also wrote five letters to all the FMM Sisters, and another eighty-five letters to individual FMM Sisters.\textsuperscript{87}

These two men proved to be of the utmost importance to the survival of the new Institute and its Franciscan foundation. Their deep spirituality and practical guidance is recounted in the writings of Helene and in the history of the Institute.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{Helene’s Decision to become Franciscan}

Helene knew that it was necessary that the Institute be incorporated into a large Order “...to support her weakness.”\textsuperscript{89} This belief was based on her experience of being denied access to the Pope when first arriving in Rome. Only the two sons of M. de Guigne were given admission to the Pope and spoke for the women.\textsuperscript{90}

On one occasion while in Brittany Helene had been invited to unite the Institute to the Dominican Order.\textsuperscript{91} She gave this suggestion some consideration as St Dominic was a distant relative on her mother’s side. In fact, she often referred to him as “uncle.”\textsuperscript{92} Nevertheless,

\textsuperscript{86} Cf. Noel Muscat OFM, “The Union of the Friars Minor (1897).” “On the feast day of St. Francis, 4 October 1897, Leo XIII published the Bull "Felicitate Quadam". From that day the families of the Observants, Riformati, Alcantarines and Recollects were officially to unite into one family, known simply by the name "Ordo Fratrum Minorum", Order of the Friars Minor. http://www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/fra/FRAht07g.html (accessed 10 March, 2017).


\textsuperscript{88} Cf. for example the private publications of the books of the Sisters: \textit{Mary of the Passion; Our Name}, a Biography of Friar Bernardino written by Helene, and published in 1910, after her death.

\textsuperscript{89} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 103.

\textsuperscript{90} Cf. above, Chapter Two, p.70.

\textsuperscript{91} Cf. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
Helene had always retained a deep love for the Franciscan spirituality, recalling her “beloved rule of St Clare”\(^{93}\) and her treasured time with the Poor Clare Sisters.

Helene realised that the Franciscan path was the one she was called to follow. She wrote: “To accomplish its designs, the Institute should have the spirit of Saint Francis.”\(^{94}\) In the Constitutions which Helene later composed, she articulated the vocation of a Franciscan Missionary of Mary: “The Name of the Institute: their special vocation is to continue on earth the mission of the Most Holy Virgin, to preach by their lives...so that they become imbued with the spirit of their Seraphic Father that he bequeathed to his children.”\(^{95}\)

Helene now saw the opportunity to return to her initial desire, as she wrote in her Memoirs, “...to become at last, what I had wanted to be since I was a girl: the daughter of St. Francis of Assisi.”\(^{96}\) Helene approached her spiritual director about becoming a Franciscan. The Minister General later wrote to Helene speaking of his decision to accept the Sisters: “When I saw that you wanted to belong to St Francis…I felt it would be a happiness and a grace for the Order. I saw that St Francis wished, through his new daughters, to spread the reign of Mary, and with Mary, that of Jesus.”\(^{97}\) Helene and her companions in Rome were received into the Third Order Regular\(^ {98}\) of St Francis on 4 October, 1882.\(^{99}\) The aim of this group is as follows:

**TO PROMOTE** within and between the *institutes of the Third Order Regular throughout the world, a true communion* favouring Franciscan life and spirituality in harmony with the spirit and content of the Rule and its fundamental values, based on the Gospel and in accordance with the teachings of the Church.\(^ {100}\)

Helene declared: “I have found my way back to St Francis...green are my pastures: the spirit of St Francis is so truly my path!”\(^ {101}\) It was some time later that Helene discovered that the year the Sisters became Franciscans was the 700\(^{th}\) Anniversary of the birth of St Francis of Assisi.

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93 In Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 159.
95 *First Constitutions*, #4.
97 Friar Bernardino, in a letter to Helene, 8 March, 1885, quoted in *Memoirs*, 95.
98 The Third Order Regular is for Religious men and women, as distinct from Third Order Secular, for laity.
100 Anne de la Boulliere, FMM “Living Our Name. Franciscan,” 26.
Besides asking that she herself become a Franciscan, Helene knew that they needed a new spiritual basis for their Institute. Helene wished to have the entire Institute placed under the Franciscan Order as well. Helene saw that this connection would add the spiritual gifts of both Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi to the new community. In their 1979 book of Helene’s spiritual notes, the Sisters explained Helene’s process of discernment:

If she hesitated, it was only so as to be more certain of God’s will; this was but a simple act of honesty with respect to the little group of sisters who had come from another spiritual family and on whom she did not wish, on her own authority, to impose her personal preferences.

Helene consulted all the Sisters about the possibility of the whole Institute becoming part of the Franciscan family. She outlined her reasons as follows:

- To give the Institute the support of a spiritual family solidly rooted in the Church, and have it share in its spiritual treasures.
- To respond to her own long-standing attraction (22 years) towards Francis, the poor and simple Gospel man.
- To help her sisters to live “in the world” without being “of the world”, and to find in the Gospel the guide for their life.
- To welcome the invitation of Pope Leo XIII, calling baptised Christians to follow in large numbers the way marked out by Francis, in order to be a ferment of renewal for the world.
- Further, as we have to work all over the world, with all kinds of clergy, we should firmly keep and study the spirit of St. Francis.
- It involves becoming deeply rooted in the spirituality, rather than being a matter of jurisdiction.

Explaining further, Helene added:

What decided my final choice was the encyclical of Leo XIII, who invited the whole world, Pastors and their flocks, to enrol in the militia of the Poor Man of Assisi, so that the world might find in his spirit of charity and detachment that regeneration it so badly needed. However, even then I did not want to decide by my own judgement. I consulted three Cardinals, their Eminences the Cardinal-Vicar, Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda and Cardinal Howard. Even more. Having dared to request the Holy Father to make known to his poor servant the will of God, I received the answer that I could do

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102 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 103.
103 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Where are You Leading Me? Personal Retreat Notes 1888, 1891, 1903* (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1979). XXVIII.
104 Anne de la Bouliere, FMM, in “Living Our Name: Franciscan,” 2010.
nothing better than to enrol all my daughters in this Third Order, that he was pleased, and that he blessed all, with this in view.\footnote{Helene de Chappotin, Letter to all the Sisters, 19 November, 1882, in Circulars and Official Letters to the Institute 1877-1904, 19.}

Helene received ‘yes’ from them all: sixteen Sisters of the original group still in India, five others who went to Coimbatore, India, in 1878, and approximately eighty-nine in France and Rome.\footnote{From statistics from the Second General Chapter of 1884 (110 Sisters) in For the Mission and Its Risks, 983. Statistics are calculated every six years at General Chapters. Statistics given at the first General Chapter is twenty Sisters.} Helene relayed the response in a letter to the Franciscan Minister General dated 19 November 1882. With this unanimous response from all the Sisters, Helene asked that they be accepted into the Franciscan family.\footnote{Cf. Helene de Chappotin, Memoirs, 26.}

The Minister General advised Helene to go to the Holy Father and “explain to him that your aim is to infuse the Franciscan spirit into your Institute in this early stage, while at the same time retaining its liberty and special character.”\footnote{Ibid.} Later in 1885 the Minister General wrote to Helene: “When I saw that you wanted to belong to St Francis…I felt it would be a happiness and a grace for the Order.”\footnote{Letter of Fr Bernardino to Helene, quoted in her Journal of 8 March, 1885, in Memoirs, 95.}

In her letter to the pope, Leo XIII [1878-1903], Helene explained her reasons for wanting the Institute to come under the umbrella of the Franciscan Order:

As superior of our young Institute, I would like to preserve it from worldliness and to imbue it with the evangelical spirit of charity, poverty and simplicity by making all its members tertiaries of the Seraphic Order. Circumstances have made me hesitate and then reflect and pray about it. Finally, Your Holiness’ encyclical appeared like a star showing me where we can all find Jesus. It would be a guarantee…that the evangelical and solidly religious spirit, which is especially necessary for missionaries, was acquired for the Institute.\footnote{Helene de Chappotin, in her letter of 15 November, 1882, to Pope Leo XIII, in Introd.: 5. Admission dans le Tiers Ordre, in Positio Super Virtutibus Vol I, 552. Cf. Leo XIII, Auspicato Concessum, (Encyclical on St. Francis of Assisi). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_ enc_17091882_auspicato_concessum_en.html 17 September 1882, (accessed 11 April, 2013).}
Pope Leo XIII, himself a member of the Third Order of St Francis,\(^{111}\) had issued an encyclical on 17 September, 1882, promoting the Third Order of St Francis to the entire Catholic world.\(^{112}\)

Before allowing Helene to inform all the Sisters of the pope’s approval, Fr Bernardino asked Helene to write “a clear and faithful account of the circumstances which had brought about its (the Institutes’) foundation.”\(^{113}\) Helene did as she was asked. The Minister General, after having read it carefully, returned it with a note at the top: “This is the truth, and the truth must prevail.”\(^{114}\)

The Sisters in Europe were received into the Third Order by Fr Bernardino, and the Sisters in India by Bishop Bardou who was himself a Third Order member.\(^{115}\) Helene later wrote of the Franciscan Rule: “The Gospel, the Rule of Saint Francis which repeats it, these are the new song of the Spirit of Love. May I be an echo.”\(^{116}\)

Helene’s spiritual director, Fr Raphael, introduced her to the writings of Saints Francis and Clare, and to the works of St Bonaventure: “Using the Fathers and Doctors of the Church he helped her, especially during her retreats, to understand the great mysteries of the faith in their theological dimensions.”\(^{117}\) During one of the retreats, Fr Raphael directed Helene to write down her experiences. Subsequently he asked her to write down all the inspirations, spiritual insights and trials she experienced. Explaining later why he asked this of her, Fr Raphael said that he “soon perceived the rare qualities of this soul, and the difficulties she was in.”\(^{118}\) Because of the foresight of this Friar the Sisters have some personal records of Helene’s spirituality and struggles.\(^{119}\)


\(^{114}\) Ibid.

\(^{115}\) Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and its Risks*, 263.


\(^{117}\) Correspondence between Fr Raphael and Helene, 5 November 1882 to 13 March 1883, in *Rome, My Spiritual Homeland*, 35.

\(^{118}\) Friar Raphael Delarbre, Letter of 21 June 1915 cited in *He Speaks to Me in the Heart of His Church*, ix.

\(^{119}\) These reflections are recorded in the books of Helene’s writings, *He Speaks to Me in the Heart of His Church and Where are you Leading Me?* (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1979.)
Friar Bernardino was so impressed with Helene that he put other Franciscan women’s Congregations in touch with her, for example the Stigmatines, of whom Helene wished to share their special relationship of being under the direct care of the Franciscan Friars, and the Franciscaines de Marie Immaculee.¹²⁰

Establishing a Community in Rome

During Helene’s time in Rome, Princess Massimo of Italy “had been looking all over Rome”¹²¹ for her. The Princess had heard of Helene and of her family’s support for Henry V of France.¹²² Meeting with Helene she recommended that the Sisters make a foundation in Rome. When Fr Raphael heard of this, he encouraged Helene to accept the princess’ assistance.¹²³ A property was found in Via Ferruccio which proved very convenient as it was also near the headquarters of the Franciscan Friars.

Helene came to realise that a house that was also close to the Vatican would be advantageous. When seeking approval for the foundation from the pope of the day, Leo XIII, she explained her reason in a letter: “…otherwise we would be obliged to make numerous costly journeys, which is contrary to the spirit of our Institute....”¹²⁴ Helene added: “A missionary congregation in Brittany, a country of faith, having its mother-house in Rome, would attract vocations.”¹²⁵ Permission was given for the foundation on 27 July, 1882.¹²⁶ Helene immediately informed the Sisters in France: “Dear Rome, it is my spiritual homeland…I am more at home here than anywhere.”¹²⁷ These words of Helene reflect her dedication, since her childhood, to the person of the Pope.¹²⁸

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¹²¹ Alini and Foujols, Rome My Spiritual Homeland, 56. Helene and the Princess remained close friends until Helene’s death in 1904.
¹²² Cf. Chapter One, The Church and State in France... Also Cf. Wikipedia Contributors, “The History of France:” “After the 16 May 1877 crisis…the Republicans voted …on free education (1881) and mandatory and laic education (1882), which Catholics felt was a gross violation of their rights. The 1905 French law on the Separation of the Churches and the State established state secularism in France, led to the closing of most Church schools.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Third_Republic (accessed 22 August, 2016).
¹²³ Alini and Foujols, Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 56.
¹²⁶ In Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 58.
¹²⁸ Cf. Chapter One.
By 1882, as Helene had not yet written the Constitutions, Fr Raphael advised her to do so. He gave her a copy of a manual written by a Dominican priest, Fr Meynard, which was an abridged version of “the canonical and practical prescriptions concerning religious with simple vows in Institutes centralised around a superior general...” 129 Helene was also told to copy from the Constitutions of other religious Institutes of the day as these contained the required lifestyle for the convent itself; for example, times of prayer, governance, regulations regarding the enclosure and the habit.130 With input also from both Mgr Bardou and Mgr David, Helene began editing the ‘Plan’ in order to compose the Constitutions for the Institute.

Helene chose to go to the Colosseum to compose a draft of the Constitutions, explaining her choice in the following words: “…sitting on a stone in the amphitheatre of the Colosseum, under the protection of so many heroic martyrs and virgins, I began to write what was to be the rule of a phalanx of missionary virgins.” 131 The Colosseum was believed to have been a place of the martyrdom of numerous Christians but this belief is contested today.132

Among changes made to the Plan which subsequently formed the basis of the first Constitutions was that of the aim of the Institute. As was said earlier, the Plan began with: “The aim...is to honour and to imitate the life of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in continuing, as far as possible, to further her action on earth...”133 The First Constitutions, however, encouraged the Sisters to be imbued with a “single aim, the imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ...”134 This change in emphasis reflected Helene’s contact with the Franciscan Friars and the rule of St Francis of Assisi: “The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ...”135

129 In Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 96.
130 Helene also had at hand the Rule of St Clare, and a manual by Fr Meynard, OP, given her by Fr Raphael. Cf. Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 96.
131 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 97.
132 Scholars today say that there was no killing of Christians in the Colosseum. Cf. “Despite numerous accounts of saints’ lives written in the Renaissance and later, there is no reliable evidence that Christians were killed in the Colosseum for their faith.” http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/secrets-of-the-colosseum-75827047/#BIBEUYCxpT4wCQFB.99 (accessed 23 August, 2016).
133 “The Plan” #1, in Alini and Foujols, Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 155.
134 From the First Constitutions, # 1, in Helene de Chappotin, Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 160. The drafts for the first Constitutions were not retained, hence it is not possible to discover the changes made to the drafts by Fr Raphael.
A major difference between Helene’s Constitutions and those of other Constitutions of her day was the manner of the election of the Provincial by *all* the Sisters, an article which she retained from the Plan.\(^{136}\)

Thus, the three basic principles of the Institute were outlined by Helene: firstly, to assure the internationality of the group as a witness to the universal mission of the Institute. Helene achieved this by sending Sisters of different nationalities to the same mission. Helene’s second norm was to have a sufficient number of Sisters in order to form a viable community. This was necessary for the mutual support of the Sisters. Her third requirement was to see that the persons chosen complemented each other in their physical, professional and spiritual capacities.\(^{137}\) Using these three basic principles, no place on the face of the earth would be excluded from their care, as Helene wrote: “...they will establish themselves even in the most dangerous and remote Foreign Missions.”\(^{138}\)

When Helene had written the Constitutions, Bishops Bardou and David were asked by *Propaganda* to comment upon them. Bishop David did not comment on the content of the draft. Rather he wrote that, being relieved of the burden that he had taken upon himself, he said that he could die in peace knowing that he had placed the Sisters “under the protection of an authority which was greater than his own.”\(^{139}\) However, Bishop Bardou in India wrote to Cardinal Simeoni\(^{140}\) insisting that the Constitutions should contain the clause whereby the Sisters stay in a mission for life and were not to be recalled unless he gave his consent.\(^{141}\) Helene saw that this would limit the Institute to a diocesan entity, and that it “would cease to be for the missions...”\(^{142}\) This went against an essential point that Helene wanted: the freedom to recall a Sister when needed for another position within the Institute. Helene could see the advantage of having Sisters with experience available to train those coming after them. Helene

\(^{136}\) Cf. “First General Chapter” above.


\(^{139}\) Cited in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 100.


\(^{141}\) Cf. Letter of Bishop Bardou to Prefect of the Congregation of the *Propaganda*, 5 August, 1882, quoted in *Rome, My Spiritual Homeland*, 101.

\(^{142}\) Ibid.
was reassured by Cardinal Simeoni that the request of the bishop would not be sanctioned by Propaganda.\textsuperscript{143}

Another aspect of the life of the Sisters of which Bishop Bardou did not approve was the daily adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In his letter to Cardinal Simeoni he expressed concern that this practice would cause the Sisters great physical fatigue.\textsuperscript{144} Helene, for her part, wrote to Cardinal Simeoni begging that the article on daily adoration of the Blessed Sacrament not be changed, as it was “one of the principal aims of the Institute.”\textsuperscript{145} It was approved as Helene had wished. The Sisters’ devotion to the Eucharist became so well-known that in 1965 Pope Paul VI chose to launch his encyclical on the Eucharist at their convent in Grottaferrata outside of Rome.\textsuperscript{146}

In the non-European countries, the mission areas were usually set up as compounds according to the practice of the day. This is made clear in the First Constitutions: “The premises intended for our apostolic activities will always be in the convent grounds unless a dispensation has been obtained from the General Council for some serious reason.”\textsuperscript{147} Each compound aimed to have all the needed facilities within them for the people being served. There were to be at least a health clinic, hospital, school and orphanage.\textsuperscript{148} The people therefore were obliged to come into the compounds for medical attention and other services. Yet Helene and the Sisters left the enclosure according to an exception in their Constitutions which was permitted by a clause introduced by Bishop Bardou. In his revision of the Plan for the writing of the Constitutions, Mgr Bardou in Ootacamund suggested that the cloister only be kept “as the works permitted.”\textsuperscript{149} This was subsequently written into the Constitutions and approved by Propaganda: “The cloister, although not canonical, will be maintained within the

\textsuperscript{143} Helene de Chappotin, in a letter to her Sisters at le Chatelets, France, 15 August, 1882, in \textit{Rome, My Spiritual Homeland}, 101.

\textsuperscript{144} Bishop Bardou, letter of 8 July 1882. He sent a copy of this letter to Helene. Cf. Ibid., 100.

\textsuperscript{145} Helene de Chappotin, letter to Cardinal Simeoni, undated, quoted in \textit{Rome, My Spiritual Homeland}, 101.


\textsuperscript{147} First Constitutions, Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{148} Cf. Chapter Five, \textit{The Development of the Institute}.

This allowed the Sisters more freedom to interact with the people whom they served:

…in order to respond to requests of the Church and urgent situations she sometimes sent the sisters outside the traditional convent setting. …In 1884, she went in haste to Rome to place herself and her sisters at the disposition of the Church which was asking for nurses for a cholera epidemic.  

The difficulties of the required cloister for most Congregations were explained later by authors John and James Cain:

The key to the difficulties experienced...lies to a great extent in the imposition and acquisition of a whole network of cloister vestiges and their application in the lives of their members. It is... almost impossible to Christianize a world when restricted from knowing it, and the lives of its inhabitants. The modern sister must be a citizen of her time, she must love and understand the people and the times. Nobody should be able to denounce her as a stranger to any truly human enterprise.  

Cain continued: “Would-be active congregations found themselves straddling the issue avoiding the cloister for apostolic reason, and yet imitating it in practice in order to obtain status as religious.” This describes the reality for the Sisters at that time.

The requirement of Enclosure was originally quite rigid and had become juridical in the Middle Ages. The rule of the enclosure was designed for the protection of women during feudal times:

The notional concept of enclosure for female religious, together with the definition of the physical walled space within which they lived, became enshrined in law. With this more specific and rigorous defining of enclosure for nuns than was understood for monks, there developed perhaps the most powerfully operative factor in religious life for women until the later 20th century. The very definition of a female religious came to be bound to acceptance of canonically regulated enclosure.  

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151 Alini and Foujols, An Apostle Sent by God, 95.
153 Cain, The Influence of the Cloister, 61.
The enclosure was kept within the convent itself yet allowed the Sisters to go out to minister to those in need. “The first such Roman approval of a simple-vow non-enclosed congregation was given in 1816… It was only in 1900, however, in Leo XIII’s document *Conditae a Christo*, that they were recognised as canonically religious.”155 As noted earlier, Helene and her community were exempted from the strict interpretation of the enclosure by *Propaganda*, thus allowing the Sisters closer contact with the people they served.156

The Approbation of the Institute placing it under *Propaganda* was given on 12 August 1885.157 When the approval of the Constitutions was given in 1896, Helene wrote that there were only a “…few small additions of a juridical nature, bringing the Constitutions into greater conformity with the type that was classical at that time.”158

As can be seen, above the requirement to copy from the rules and regulations of other Congregations, the Institute began as a monastic, institutional entity. The basis of this way of life was European, and therefore alien to many of the peoples amongst whom the Sisters were to minister. This manner of life only changed following the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965].159

**Helene Assists Others in Writing their Documents**

Helene’s Spiritual Director was so impressed with Helene’s clarity of vision in composing the Constitutions that he advised various groups to contact her to assist them in writing their Statutes and Constitutions. For instance, in 1894 Helene was requested to edit the Statutes of the Association of St Peter Claver. This association was founded to assist the evangelisation of Africa. Helene also sent two Sisters to assist in the formation of the first religious of that congregation. She supported them financially and sought patrons for them.160


156 Cf. In his suggestions to *Propaganda*, Bishop Bardou requested that the enclosure not hinder the ministry of the Sisters.


159 Cf. Chapter Seven.

In September 1900 Helene was requested to assist in the writing of the Statutes for the Oblates of St Philip Neri. Their foundress’ aim was “for a strictly lay apostolate, whilst living in community but without vows…engaged in various activities in favour of infants and young children in need.”\footnote{In a Letter from Contessa Melanie Zichy-Metternich to Helene, in \textit{C. Dans la Période d’Expansion de l’Institut: 1885-1904}, in \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus}, Vol II, 1304.} In October of the same year, Helene was asked by Fr Raphael to assist in the formation in the Franciscan spirituality of the Missionaries of the Holy Family.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus}, Vol I, LI, LII.} This Institute was founded for the professional and Christian formation of young workers.\footnote{Cf. \textit{C. Dans la Période d’Expansion de l’Institut: 1885-1904}, in \textit{Positio Super Virtutibus}, Vol II, 1305.} Also Francesca Saviero Cabrini stayed with the Sisters in their house in Rome throughout 1887 while founding her Institute, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, 1302. Frances Cabrini was canonised in 1946.}

In consultation with various bishops, Helene offered to form religious women for their various dioceses.\footnote{Cf. Alini and Foujols, \textit{An Apostle Sent by God}, 117.} It is clear from the assistance that Helene offered groups other than her own that she was interested in helping in whatever way possible to advance the reign of God’s love in the world.

\textit{Guidebook for the Sisters’ Way of Life}

Drawing on the helpfulness of the Manual Helene had prepared for the Reparatrice Sisters in India, she wrote a \textit{Customs Book} for her own Sisters, “a detailed explanation of the Constitutions which regulated in minute detail the occupations of every day…”\footnote{Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 171.} Explaining the reason for this Book, Helene said it was so that each mission community would not be isolated and thereby risk breaking the sense of belonging. Each one would have the same “customs, spirit and rule (to maintain) general unity, which guarantees that the religious who leave the centre to go here or there will find the same way of life.”\footnote{Helene de Chappotin, \textit{Circulars and Official Letters to the Institute 1877-1904}, (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1972), 11.} Helene stressed the need for unity following the Sisters’ experiences of division as Reparatrice Sisters in India.\footnote{Cf. Chapter Two.} This Book was based on the European religious culture of the day, and it was taken for granted that it would be suitable in any place or situation. Helene also wrote guidelines for the various roles of responsibility within the Institute. Dom Antoine Marie OSB referred to Helene’s book...
for novice mistresses as “a veritable treatise on spiritual formation.” However, following feedback from the Sisters in the various communities, Helene realised that it needed to be adapted to the local situations and advised each mission area to do so. These books remained in use until the Second Vatican Council.

An important aspect of the Constitutions was the financial arrangements. Helene asked that each community try to be self-sufficient wherever possible, by generating enough income to provide for themselves and for their work with the poor. This, however, was very difficult as most of the areas to which the Sisters went were extremely poor and benefactors were few. In order to assist each foundation and ensure true poverty according to the ideal of St Francis of Assisi, Helene set up a common fund; there would be one purse for the whole Institute. This allowed for the support of communities and works which were unable to sustain themselves. Those communities which were able, sent what they could to the mother house. These funds would then be re-distributed according to the needs of other foundations. The Sisters also made small items that they could sell to raise funds for the works; for example, vestments for the clergy, table cloths and other works of embroidery.

Thinking that all the struggles of founding the Institute were settled, Helene wrote in 1882: “…the Institute is not, like many good works today, the fruit of devotion and human reason; it is an apostle sent by God.”

Removal as Superior General

The progress of the Institute was halted by the revival of the accusations of insubordination and immoral conduct made earlier against Helene. No sooner had Helene expressed her desire that the whole Institute join the Franciscan Third Order than the malicious rumours against her which had started in India began to spread in Rome itself. In September, 1882, the Superior General of the Passionist Fathers warned Helene, saying: “There has been very strong pressure from Jesuits on Propaganda in favour of the Marie Reparatrice and against

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170 This remains the practice today within the Institute.
171 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 518.
172 Helene de Chappotin, Letter of 26 September, 1882, quoted in Mary of the Passion, 112.
173 Cf. Chapter Two.
the Missionaries of Mary.” Six months after this warning, Helene was suspended as Superior General, effective from 16 March, 1883:

Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, making reference to Cardinal Simeoni who himself was retransmitting an order from Leo XIII, told Mary of the Passion that she was suspended from her office as superior general with the prohibition of communicating with her Sisters.

The letter sent to the convent accused Helene of a lack of “serious internal discipline” when she was Provincial of the Reparatrice in India. This accusation was based on the order of Mother d’Oultremont to Helene on 22 August, 1876, to leave India. However, as noted previously, that order was rescinded in a subsequent telegram to Helene.

The number of Sisters in the house in Rome was to be reduced from twenty to four, and no more candidates were to be accepted. Helene was also told she could not contact the Sisters anywhere, in any way. Two Assistants General were delegated by Mgr Bouché in India to go to Rome to take over the affairs of the Institute.

On 3 April, 1883, Mgr Bouché wrote to Propaganda recounting Helene’s noble family and their devotion to the papacy. Later, during his ad limina visit to Rome in 1884, he explained Helene’s situation to Pope Leo XIII, and asked for a thorough examination of the accusations against her. The Assistants General for their part wrote to Cardinal Simeoni of Propaganda highlighting the contradictions in the accusations, and also requested a thorough investigation.

In his personal journal, The Franciscan Friar Raphael wrote of the situation:

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175 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 149.
176 From letter quoted in *Docum.: 4. Limitation Imposée à la Maison de Rome, Positio Super Virtutibus*, Vol I, 591. Hearing that Helene’s name had been cleared in 1884, the lawyer wrote to M. Sainte-Veronique, the Assistant General, saying: ‘This work of reparation and justice has been more necessary for the Holy See than for your Mother Superior.’ Ibid.
177 Cf. Chapter Two.
180 The *ad limina* visit is when a bishop gives a report of his Diocese to the Pope.
The affairs of the Missionaries of Mary, who have been the object of such serious measures on the part of the Holy See, have taken much of my time. After several threatening humiliations, Mother of the Passion has suddenly been deposed from her office as Superior General by a disposition of the S.C. [Sacred Congregation] of the Propaganda, based on an order from the Pope, and this drastic step was taken without warning, without giving her a chance to defend herself....

The Minister General of the Franciscan Friars, Fr Bernardino, also spoke on behalf of Helene and the Missionaries of Mary: “I know the Missionaries of Mary. They are in the right, and their affair must be examined without prejudice, having no end in view but Our Lord Jesus Christ and his justice!”

In July, 1883, Propaganda asked for declarations from the three Apostolic Vicars of India who had had contact with the Reparatrice Sisters at the time of the original accusations against Helene. One of the three, Mgr. Laouenan, MEP, during a visit to the Madurai mission in July 1876, had written a letter to Mgr. Bouché at the instigation of M. Sainte-Anne, Reparatrice, accusing Helene of immoral conduct. He allowed the letter to be copied by M. Sainte-Anne before sending it. Copies were then sent to various people in France and Rome. Mgr. Laouenan later acknowledged in his reply to Propaganda that “he had allowed himself to be drawn into accusations that were without foundation.” He added: “I did not know the women, not even their names.”

Cardinal Lavigerie, [1825-1892], had heard of Helene’s missionary vision and proposed a merger of the Institute with his own congregation of women, the Society of Teaching and Nursing Sisters of Our Lady of the Mission of Africa, of Algiers (known as the White Sisters). When he learnt that Helene was under investigation, he assured her that in Algiers and under his protection, she would have nothing to fear. However, Helene, conscious of her duty to the call from God as she experienced it, replied: “Your eminence... I cannot sell my

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183 Very Rev Father Bernardino of Portogruaro, quoted in Mary of the Passion, 114.
188 Ibid. Lavigerie was also founder of the White Fathers, “whom, for the purpose he established and maintained at great cost orphan asylums, industrial schools, hospitals, and agricultural settlements, wherein the Arabs could be brought under the influence of the Gospel.”
Helene’s vision for the Institute was broader than that of the Cardinal who wished for Sisters for his own missions in Africa.

Following numerous requests by the Franciscan Friars and Bishops Bardou and Bouché, Pope Leo XIII ordered a careful investigation of Helene. This inquiry lasted the entire month of March, 1884.

Throughout that month of anguish and suffering, Fr Raphael Delarbre encouraged Helene to trust in God “with the confidence of a blind person who clings to the hand she does not see.”

Her suffering, however, was indeed intense:

> From time to time the emptiness, humiliation and loss of all that is still dear to me appear to my heart as such a bitter chalice that even my body and my whole nature are overwhelmed with disgust and terror. Yet up till now I have not once refused to drink it. From this abandonment I fell into a deep abyss of love where nothing can make me suffer, since Jesus is my all and he is my Saviour.

It was during this ordeal that Helene finally learnt the full extent of the accusations made against her when a Reparatrice Sister: immoral conduct with the superior of the Jesuit mission, Fr. Cabos, SJ. Recounting her reaction she wrote: “All the Breton and Spanish blood in my veins boiled!” The accusation had been made by the Reparatrice Sister, M. Sainte-Anne, who had been sent by the Foundress of the Reparatrice as the Visitator. As stated previously, the other Sisters had been ordered under obedience not to speak of the matter and hence Helene was unaware of the accusation.

**Helene is Reinstated**

The investigation was carried out by a Spiritan priest, Fr Eschbach, Consultor of the Holy Office. After the month-long study, Fr Eschbach wrote a brief note on the dossier: “The finger...”

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190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.


193 Quoted in Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 156.

of God is here.” On 30 March 1884, the investigating committee voted in favour of Helene’s total reinstatement. Yet the official decision was not conveyed to Helene or to the Sisters until the end of April. The delay was explained by Cardinal Parrochi, the Apostolic Vicar of Rome, telling Helene that “great pressure had been brought to bear on those around the Holy Father in order to prevent the notification of his decision.” In a letter to Mgr Bouché, Cardinal Simeoni of Propaganda explained the delay in communicating the decision, it was due “to pressure exercised by their opponents to prevent the communication.” The opposition had again originated with the Reparatrice Sisters and some Jesuits.

Bishop Bouché wrote to the Sisters:

> By the fact of this decision by the highest authority, your congregation’s situation is regularized. The question of your autonomy will never again be questioned. You are indeed a Congregation, and Mother Mary of the Passion’s unjust exclusion has been revoked by the Holy Father himself…

During the year-long suspension of Helene and the reduction in the numbers of the community, the apostolate continued. Catechism classes and preparations for First Communion continued to be given in the local parish.

Helene suffered greatly from these false accusations and saw her Sisters also in great anguish for the lack of truth and charity. Thus, a constant theme in Helene’s spiritual notes and writings is ‘Truth and Charity.’ These two virtues, therefore, were frequently on her mind and in her prayers. In 1903 she penned: “Lies and unneighbourly deeds are the weapons of the majority, even of the Catholics; one sees it even in Holy Orders and among religious... we are parched through the lack of truth, we are wounded by the lack of charity.”

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195 In Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 156.
198 Ibid.
199 Quoted by Helene de Chappotin, in Memoirs, 83, 84.
200 Cf. Alini and Foujols, Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 80.
201 Quoted in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 240.
In another of her many letters Helene wrote: “Let us be, as much as possible, Truth and Charity. This will mean putting God into our life, and God is the Almighty...Happy the simple soul who lives in the transparency of truth and charity!”

In a talk given to the Sisters in Rome, Helene said: “…be souls of utter truth! Always cling to truth, to pure unalloyed truth…what I want is for you to be ever straight forward, upright souls, living in great purity of conscience.”

Reflecting further on her sufferings, Helene wrote:

My trials have produced five good results:
1. They induced me to weep for my sins.
2. They gave me a horror of evil.
3. They detached me from creatures.
4. They led me to do everything for the love of God. I offered all to Him.
5. They gave me a great need to suffer, to be a Victim for the Church and for souls.

Referring to the suffering caused to her by certain popes, Helene wrote: “God wished me to be made a victim even by the Popes. Pius IX and Leo XIII have crucified me as men and saved me as Popes.” This made Helene realise more fully the need for prayer for the popes and the Church.

Helene asked the Sisters not to dwell on the past but forgive those who caused them so much grief. She begged the Sisters, “…when you examine your conscience, see whether you have failed in charity in thought or in word towards those who have made us suffer. Let us not speak about them any more unless that becomes absolutely necessary for business reasons.”

Helene and the Sisters had been unaware of slanderous letters which had been sent to various bishops in Europe. On hearing of these, she wrote in her Memoirs:

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202 Helene de Chappotin in her letter of 19 March, 1897, to the Sisters in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 511, and The Spirit of the Institute, 30. “Truth and Charity” was the motto of Pope Leo XIII, Cf. Mary of the Passion, 103.
203 During a Retreat given in 1903, in The Spirit of the Institute, 3.
204 Letter of 20 October 1882, in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 142.
205 Helene de Chappotin, in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 146.
It is not really surprising that we should encounter hostility. After all, my first companions and I had left for the missions so many years ago that we had become strangers even to our own families, so we could understand why people felt suspicious and distrustful of a new Institute founded in far-off India in unusual circumstances.\textsuperscript{207}

On 8 December, 1884, two years after Helene had been deposed and then re-elected as Superior General, she sent the revised Constitutions to the Sisters. These revisions included Franciscan themes which showed that Helene was deeply imbued with the spirit of St. Francis.\textsuperscript{208} Helene used many of these themes in her letters to the Sisters:

Openness to what is happening in the world...she shared with her sisters by means of her letters. Consequently, she formed herself and formed others to be open, taking inspiration from the Bible and from St. Francis, analyzing the events of the day in this light.\textsuperscript{209}

Regarding the foundation of this new Institute, a Prelate for the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda of the day wrote:

For women as well as for men, there was a need of an exclusively missionary institute in which the missionary vocation would be the first concern, and whose sole object would be the conversion of pagans by works of charity of every kind adapted to the conditions and needs of different countries. \textsuperscript{210}

Summary

In setting up the new community, Helene was obliged to follow the customs of her time. Hence, the Institute had monastic practices, and was European in life-style. Helene utilised her previous experience of religious life, adding some unique characteristics to the rules she was given to copy. Because of the sufferings and calumny Helene had endured from her time in India, she repeatedly encouraged her Sisters to act always in charity and with truth.

The slander against Helene and the Sisters had led to years of struggle to establish the Institute.

\textsuperscript{207} Helene de Chappotin, Memoirs, 37.
\textsuperscript{209} Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, “The Writings of Mary of the Passion,” 4.
\textsuperscript{210} Mgr. De Guebriant, quoted by Georges Goyau, in Valiant Women. Mother Mary of the Passion and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. (Sydney, NSW: O'Loughlin Brothers, 1953), v.
The assistance first of all by the de Guigne brothers and Count d’Ercheville was vital for the foundation of the Institute. Subsequently, the guidance and support the Sisters received from Bishops Bardou and Bouché, and from the Franciscan Friars, resulted in Helene and all the Sisters being cleared of the false accusations against them.

In her review of Launay’s book on Helene, author Sandra Horvarth-Peterson, praised the background information it provided:

…very good in providing the reader with a larger view of both nineteenth-century spirituality and the burgeoning French missionary activity, arguing that with institutionally-loyal women like Helene who ‘went out to change the world,’ we can see a powerful French and Christian feminism.211

Despite the repeated opposition from so many quarters, the Institute flourished. The following Chapter will explore the evolution in Helene’s mission theology and spirituality in which she formed her Sisters.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Helene’s Mission Theology and Missionary Spirituality as Perceived in Her Writings and Decisions

Overview

Helene’s understanding of mission theology and missionary spirituality and the ideas she expressed followed somewhat the missionary practices of her time. Helene may not have exactly used the same words, nor might she have articulated a clear understanding of those concepts, but they are present in her writings. Missiology as a specific discipline had not yet come into existence when Helene was founding her new Institute. However, one can deduce her missiology from her writings and from the decisions that she took.

The ministries of the Sisters actually expressed a missiology that would be more fully articulated later at Vatican II, e.g., that mission exists wherever there is need of service, whether it be in Europe or in other nations. The Sisters responded to the immediate needs of people through charity whether it be in hospitals, refugee camps, or orphanages; mission crosses cultural boundaries, e.g. recruiting indigenous people for the Congregation and then letting the different groups work together for the betterment of all.

Key to both her mission theology and mission spirituality was her vision of the special vocation of the Sisters to be ‘contemplatives in action,’ combining the two expressions of religious life: the contemplative life of prayer, and the active life of outreach for evangelisation. Helene responded to whatever need presented itself so as to give witness to the love of God for every human being.

Helene’s theology evolved from initially seeking to imitate Mary of Nazareth in giving Jesus to the world. Later, on encountering the Franciscan Friars and becoming a Franciscan, she based her way of life on that lived by Francis of Assisi. This was to strive to live the Gospel,
through spreading the overwhelming love of God for all humanity as seen in the life and death of Jesus Christ. As mentioned earlier, St Francis frequently exclaimed: “Love is not loved!”

**Helene’s Mission Theology**

**Source of mission**

‘Mission’ was seen as mostly Europeans spreading the gospel message to others, as the Sisters later explained: “The missionary aspect of exchanges between the local churches was limited to going from west to east, from north to south…already constituted a basic element of universal mission.” Helene responded to this to some extent by insisting on ‘internationality’ within the Institute. This was the inclusion of women from any nationality in the Institute, thus being living proof of the word ‘Catholic’ – all-inclusive.

Helene had experienced the two aspects of the religious vocation during her life-time; firstly, the contemplative prayer life with the enclosed Poor Clare Sisters and the active life of service with the Reparatrice Sisters for eleven years. She explained it as follows: “I saw the Institute dear to Saint Francis giving women the science of the mixed life of the First Order; prayer and the apostolate, that which was not possible at the time of St Clare.” While St Clare and her Sisters initially left their monastery during the day to tend the lepers with the Franciscan Friars, all religious women were confined to their convents by Pope Eugene at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

The active aspect of the vocation is found in following Jesus who gave “his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). This is the specifically missionary orientation of the prayer-action life of the Sisters and was to be the program for their entire lives: “The Christ whom we contemplate sends us out to our brothers and sisters in whom we discover his hidden presence.

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3 Helene de Chappotin, Spiritual Notes, 216, in Luigia Vittoria Alini and Anne-Marie Foujols, *For a reading of the new Constitutions with Mary of the Passion*, (Grottaferrata, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1980), 152.
4 “For female religious orders, the restrictions of enclosure and the wearing of habits had been made mandatory by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and re-emphasized at the Council of Trent in the 16th century.” Clark, *Heaven in Conflict*, 217.
And our brothers and sisters send us back to the contemplation of Christ.”

Helene summarised her project for the life of a Franciscan Missionary of Mary in the following words: “To call down the mercy of God on souls by prayer, and to lead souls to God by the labours of the missionary life; that is the whole life of a Franciscan Missionary of Mary.” The Sisters were to have “as their sole program to love Christ, to serve Him and to offer the Gospel to the whole world.” In one of her meditations Helene expressed her desire to be Love’s missionary: “O my Crucified Saviour, grant me the grace to understand your thirst for love….As a missionary I want to go in search of hearts, begging them to give You this love for which You thirst, O Jesus.”

Helene’s understanding of mission was summarised by two of the Sisters, writing of Helene’s missionary dynamism:

To reach the whole world… this family… had to form an organism morally and technically adapted to every apostolate in the missionary field. Beyond all frontiers, it would be prepared to undertake any work of charity, spiritual or corporal, ready for every task, with a view to a good to be accomplished… Her horizons seemed to have been as vast as the earth; no barrier stopped her religious, to whom she was happy to write in 1896: “Oceania alone will be wanting to be wanting…”

Any consideration of the word ‘mission’ requires that it is the acknowledgement that it is God’s mission: It is God who sends. All Christians are sent in their turn just as Jesus was sent: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:18). Long before the term Missio Dei was being frequently used, Helene expressed this understanding of ‘mission’ in following the example of Mary of Nazareth in carrying out the will of the Father:

This charism is lived in the fundamental attitude that was Mary’s Ecce and Fiat: she offered her whole being in complete and loving openness, in faith and humble service, so that the Spirit might carry out the Father’s work in her.

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5 Constitutions, #3.
6 Helene de Chappotin, “Meditations” no. 705.
7 Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 124.
8 Helene de Chappotin, Meditation quoted in The Spirit of the Institute, 133.
10 First Constitutions, #2.
This understanding of the concept of the *Missio Dei* was not uncommon in Helene’s era. It was also used by the Foundress of the Our Lady of the Missions Congregation, Euphrasie Barbier: “Missions is…solely the Mission of the Incarnate Word, sent by God the Father to redeem the human race, and the Mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, to bring about the sanctification of Christ’s Church.”¹¹ Thus, ‘mission’ was generally understood as carrying on the mission given to Jesus by the Father. As explained later by the author Eddie Arthur, “In a modern setting, Karl Barth, in a 1932 paper, set out the idea that mission was God’s work and that authentic church mission must be in response to God’s *missio*.”¹²

Although, as was said earlier, there was no articulated mission theology during Helene’s lifetime she, like others before her, took as her theological basis for mission the Gospel imperative to “go and make disciples of the nations...” (Mt 28:19). As one of the Sisters explained, mission in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries consisted of “…exchanges between the local churches (and) was limited to going from west to east, from north to south…”¹³

Many of the religious missionary congregations founded at the nineteenth century had a sense of the urgency for mission in response to the “…satanic impiety…”¹¹ which was seen as destroying the faith in Europe.² Helene shared this belief.¹⁴

**Mission and salvation**

The understanding of mission in the nineteenth century was a continuation of the ideas of many centuries previously, as seen for example with St Francis Xavier, one of the patrons of missions.¹⁵

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For Catholics, mission in the nineteenth century had as one of its primary goals the conversion of pagans, infidels, and heretics through planting the church (plantatio ecclesiae) where it had not yet been established. Most Catholics believed that outside of the church there was no salvation, so it was important to baptise as many as possible.16

Whilst Helene believed in the supremacy of the Catholic faith, she did not believe in the eternal condemnation of those who did not belong to it. Rather, she saw every human being as destined for salvation: “I saw love, truth, unity…The happiness of being one with one’s God is heaven; to share this happiness with others is a heaven nearer still to heaven…”17 This passage is another example of Helene’s belief that salvation is not dependent upon baptism into the Catholic faith but faith in one’s own belief in God however one perceives this God. Thus, Helene did not permit the Sisters to baptize unless the people requested it.18

In the nineteenth century the ‘Great Commission’ in the Gospel according to Matthew was the guiding text for missionary work:

> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20).

This Commission marked a new stage in the mission and showed the development of thought within the Gospel according to Matthew. In an earlier passage, Jesus stated that he was limited to Israel: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6).19

Subsequent scholarship on the scriptures has clarified this understanding of mission. Scripture scholars explained that, although the Commission is not the actual words of Jesus, it reflects the growing understanding of Jesus’ mission: “The three parts of the commission…constitute the program adopted by the infant movement, but do not reflect direct instructions from Jesus.”20

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16 Smith, Women in Mission, 135.
17 Helen de Chappotin, cited in An Apostle Sent by God, 40.
18 Cf. First Constitutions, #113.
Besides the ‘Great Commission’ in Matthew (28:19), there are similar directives in the Gospel according to Luke and in Acts, Chapter 1. Author Robert Thomas explained:

These commissions in Matthew 28, Luke 24 and Acts 1:7… have been created by the individual evangelists to express their conception of the future of the Jesus movement. As a consequence, they cannot be traced back to Jesus. The commission in Matthew is expressed in Matthew’s language and reflects the evangelist’s idea of the world mission of the Church.\(^{21}\)

It is evident that one must be a disciple before one can witness to the Gospel. For instance, one must be striving to live according to the entire Gospel – especially the Beatitudes (cf. Mt Ch. 5). The Commission comes at the end of the Gospel, indicating that the preceding chapters are guidelines for the ultimate work of mission. The earlier chapters presuppose that the missionary has learnt how to ‘make disciples’ by first becoming a disciple. That is, taking up the call of the whole Gospel, living as Jesus had lived, to “have compassion on the crowd” (Mt 15: 32).

During this early history of Christianity, there was rich diversity, for example, in theology and church ministry. Likewise, mission was carried out in a wide variety of forms within the social-political, religious and institutional context. In fact, every ministry was missionary, because at this point the entire church saw itself in this way. Mission was not a part of the church’s reality, rather Mission was the very essence of the church.\(^{22}\)

Helene showed by her example and in her writings that it was necessary to have the spirit of the Gospels before attempting to respond to the full demands of the Great Commission. This is what Helene called her Sisters to do, to show God’s love by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger… (Cf. Mt 25:35). In this way, the Sisters would be a “light to the world” (Mt 5: 14).

When discerning any situation, Helene studied the issue, then prayed about it, asking advice from her spiritual director or others whose opinions she valued, before making any final decision. This method was continued by her Sisters and followed Cardinal Cardijn’s method for decision making.

\(^{21}\) Robert L. Thomas, “Historical Criticism and the Great Commission.” TMSJ 11/1, (Spring 2000), 46.

\(^{22}\) Bevans, and Schroeder. *Constants in Context*, 83.
for discernment which he proposed for his Young Christian Workers’ Movement. As one member of the Movement shared:

We learned the processes of societal analysis, took options for the poorer and more oppressed of workers and alliances with the union movement. We came to understand that work is central to the whole way that society is organised, that as the pope says work is a key and probably the essential key to the whole social question...

The current theologian Sandra Schneiders reminded her readers of the definition of theology: ‘Faith seeking understanding’:

It is crucial to recognize that the theology of the Gospel arises from, rather than generates, the spirituality of the Gospel. It is the theology, however, that gives us access to the spirituality. In other words, it was a particular lived experience of union with God in the risen Jesus through his gift of the Spirit/Paraclete within the believing community (spirituality) that gave rise gradually to a particular articulated understanding of Christian faith (theology).

Helene understood the above emphasis on one’s lived experience when she wrote in her Customs Book: “May the candles that we are given (at the time of profession) make us desire and pray for light for all infidels, especially those in our own missions, and enkindle our fervour in living up to our vocation as Missionaries of Mary.”

Helene based her unique way of fulfilling this call to ‘make disciples’ on her experiences of religious life as a Poor Clare and a Reparatrice Sister: combining the contemplative and active life. The principal aim of their missionary calling was not to baptise but to spread the love of God. Helene, like St Francis of Assisi, would be guided by the phrase: “Love is not loved!”

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26 Customs Book 1, in The Spirit of the Institute, 126.

27 Cf. above, SCTJM, “The Life of St. Francis of Assisi.”
Mission and Geography

As reported earlier, Helene’s unique approach from the very beginning was to make her Institute specifically for mission ad extra, going beyond the confines of Catholic Europe. Helene even went to the point of wanting to make a fourth vow similar to that of the Jesuits - to go wherever the Vatican officials wished their presence.28

At the time of the foundation of the Institute, there were many other Congregations which had missionary aspects to a certain extent. The Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, established by the Society of Mary priests and bishops, formed small communities in Wallis and Futuna, in New Caledonia, and later in Samoa.29 Arnold Janssen [1837-1909], who began the Divine Word Missionaries in 1875, founded the Holy Spirit Sisters in 1889. He initially established them to assist his priests in their missionary work. However, in 1910 the Sisters became independent financially and administratively from the Divine Word Missionaries. They subsequently spread to other places such as the United States, Brazil and Papua New Guinea. They expanded their missionary service to health, social and educational ministries.30

In her own understanding of mission, Helene retained some of the practices of the Reparatrice Sisters to which she was introduced during her time in India, yet added three fundamental principles to her own specific missionary vision:

- the absence of geographical frontiers enabling the Sisters to extend their activities to the ends of the earth;
- the absence of a specific field of work, thus making it easy to respond to the traditional works or to new initiatives necessary for the different groups of people;
- the international composition of the community, the deliberate mixing of nationalities, “thus reproducing in the religious family the catholicity of the Church.”31

28 Cf. Chapter Three: as noted, permission for this fourth vow was denied by Propaganda, as it was said to be contained in the vow of obedience.
30 Cf. Smith, Women in Mission, 141.
31 Sumarium, III, Le Virtu Della Serva di Dio in Generale, Positio Super Virtutibus, Vol I, CIV.
Mission and the Holy Spirit

Some of the aspects which Helene saw as necessary for ‘making disciples of the nations’ are reflected in her spiritual notes. These writings are replete with references to the guidance she and the Sisters sought of the Holy Spirit: the need for a sound spirituality (to be contemplatives-in-action), and the value of a holistic formation.

Writing in the twentieth century, missiologist Louis Luzbetak spoke of these aspects of mission spirituality that Helene wished to instil in the Sisters, such as: “three-fold requirements for mission: centrality of the Holy Spirit, the need of spirituality, the importance of human knowledge and skill.” Yet some authors considered the emphasis on the action of Holy Spirit as a new orientation: “There is an emerging trend in some contemporary Church documents and missiological writings to emphasize the agency of the Spirit in mission.” However, the importance of the Holy Spirit in any work of mission is clearly seen in Helene’s writings and Luzbatek’s work, as well as that of many foundresses in their writings.

Mission and Creation

Helene based her mission theology for the new Institute on her high esteem for the Franciscan emphasis on the oneness of the whole human race. St Francis believed that this unity was the result of the Incarnation: that everyone is brother/sister to each other. The whole of creation was indeed brother and sister, for Francis called the sun ‘Brother,’ the moon, ‘Sister,’ and so on. God’s gift to the whole human race was everything created and its beauty enthralled Francis.

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32 Cf. Her writings in Meditations; Where are you Leading Me? and Rome, My Spiritual Homeland.
33 Cf. “Missionary Spirituality” below.
34 Cf. Chapter Five, “Professional Formation.”
39 Cf. Ibid.
**Mission and the Trinity**

Whilst Helene considered non-Catholics misguided, and non-Christians as living in darkness, she never considered them as lost for eternity. This can be seen in Helene’s spiritual notes: “I saw my beautiful Trinity and Its union with my soul and with all souls…” Here Helene demonstrates her belief in the ultimate union of every single person with God.

Helene repeatedly reminded the Sisters to strive for unity wherever they are sent, for this union within their communities reflects the life of love within the Trinity: “It seems to be that whenever Religious come together, they must be united among themselves in order to accomplish God’s work. ‘Be one, as My Father and I are One.’ Let us seek to be truly one heart and one soul.” This was to be the Sisters’ guide for living the Gospel way of life.

**God’s Mission**

As said earlier, the term Missio Dei [God’s mission] was not used in Helene’s day; yet she certainly considered the Institute and its mission as the work of God, directed by the Holy Spirit, in which she and the Sisters participated. Helene wrote: “If it were my work, it would finish with me, but it is the work of God.” Explaining the purpose of the Institute, Helene wrote that it is to demonstrate God’s love for every person: “Go...proclaim over there, very far away, that Jesus is love.” She added: “Just as love is a fire that spreads, if we love, we will help others to love. One day the blaze will flare up...we will have added our little spark to this fire which should consume hearts.” Thus, while wishing for conversions to Catholicism, Helene’s primary aim was to spread the love of God to as many people as possible.

**Mission and other Religions**

As a woman of her time, Helene accepted without question the Church’s sense that Catholicism was superior to other religions. She also held the belief that the European culture was the...
universal norm for all peoples. As Helene encouraged her Sisters: “Future missionaries should not draw back from any of these works [prayer, proclamation and human development] which ought to enable them to civilise at the same time as converting.” The Missiologist Peter Phan wrote of the damage this attitude has caused over the years:

…missionaries sought to transplant or reproduce in another culture the type of church of their origins, with its organisational structure, law, ways of worship, and theology… And since these elements of their original churches were tightly woven with European culture, mission often meant Europeanization.

Raimund Panikkar, an interfaith-dialogue theologian, writing on the influence of European culture on others, used the term, ‘theological colonialism’:

A liturgy and a set of postures in prayer were exported…with a similar type of art, forms of piety, customs and social ideals, European philosophy and political ideas. And still more was involved, since this offer of total Europeanization presupposed the condemnation of the indigenous.

This attitude was reflected in the practices of most missionaries until the Second Vatican Council. In 1885 Pope Leo XIII expressed the common attitude of the Church to non-European nations at that time, and to which Helene subscribed. He wrote: “…Christian Europe has subdued barbarous nations, and changed them from a savage to a civilized condition, from superstition to true worship.” Helene saw her Sisters bringing civilization as well as Christianity to the people to whom they went. Yet despite having this attitude, Helene’s approach to mission, her mission theology, was different from that of many of her contemporaries for she did not permit the Sisters to proselytise.

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45 Ibid., 73.
49 Leo XIII, Immortale Dei (On the Christian Constitution of States) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei-e.htm (accessed 16 May, 2009), #6, #21. This encyclical was written in the same year that King Leopold II of Belgium took control of part of the Congo. Cf. Chapter Five.
50 Cf. Chapter Five.
Mission as Witness and not Proselytism

While some other Congregations actively promoted conversion to Catholicism, Helene would not allow the Sisters to proselytise, but encouraged them to respect each person’s faith commitment. She wrote: “Seek means of contact and dialogue with mutual esteem, without proselytising…attentively listening in order to understand and discover points of encounter.” In her meditation for the feast of St Antonia of Florence, Helene wrote: “May our charity be the visible expression of God’s immense love for souls.”

The prohibition against proselytising was repeated with each reprinting of the Constitutions. As mentioned earlier, if any adult was dying the Sisters were advised to ask if he/she wished to be baptised and were to respect their decision and not proceed with the baptism if they had said “no”. Yet, if a baby were dying the Sisters could baptise the baby. Helene required this approach as she saw ‘converting’ as best achieved through the example of one’s life of service. She wrote that “more often than not charity arouses in them the desire for baptism.” This approach recalls the words of an early Church author, Tertullian, who imagined the Pagans saying: “See how these Christians love one another.”

The soundness of this theological approach was demonstrated in Colombo in 1886, where the Sisters were in charge of a large hospital. Archbishop Bonjean wrote to Helene: “Right from the start, conversions and baptism were so numerous that the delighted Oblate Fathers declared: ‘The hospital is a mission within the Mission!’” This theological understanding of mission is very much in harmony with post-Vatican II Missiology. Helene’s understanding of mission was later reiterated by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi in 1975. He wrote: “…the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life…”

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51 For instance, the Maryknoll Sisters’ Constitutions “required the sisters be sent to pagans in heathen lands for their personal sanctification and to convert others to Christianity.” Cf. Smith, Women in Mission, 179.
52 In the First Constitutions #118.
53 Helene de Chappotin, quoted in The Spirit of the Institute, 137.
54 Cf. First Constitutions, #113.
55 Helene de Chappotin, First Constitutions, #114.
56 Tertullian, in “To the Gentiles and Apology.” Quoted by J. Warren Smith “See how these Christians love one another.” https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/see-how-these-christians-love/ (accessed 15 October, 2014).
57 Archbishop Bonjean in a letter to Helene, in Mary of the Passion, 184.
58 Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, #41.
This theme was also repeated by Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*:

59 “The first form of evangelization is witness” (#42).

**Mission and other Christians**

As seen earlier, Helene was very Catholic in her outlook and other Christian denominations were considered by her to be either heretical or at least in serious error. 60 However, her emphasis was more on proclaiming the Reign of God than on ‘making converts.’ An exception to this general attitude was seen when Helene herself wrote of her deep longing that the French philosopher Paul Sabatier (1858-1928), a Protestant, become a Catholic. However, despite her many meetings with him, she never broached the subject. 61 On one of his visits to Italy, Sabatier took Helene on a tour of the ruins of the ancient hospices where St Francis and his first followers used to go daily to care for those afflicted with Hansen’s disease. 62 His three books on St Francis had re-awakened widespread interest in the saint. 63

**Mission and Other Congregations**

Helene and the Sisters’ missionary zeal, enhanced by their experiences in India, led them to be willing to cross and re-cross the seas for the sake of the Gospel. One of the Sisters, Marie Agnes de Saint Jean-Baptiste, wrote of the difficulties of her journey to China. It took six months from Marseille in France to reach her destination – Tong-Yien-Fang, in the centre of China. 64 Sister Saint Jean-Baptiste wrote that it was the Sisters’ commitment to bring the Good News of the Reign of God that strengthened them on these difficult journeys. 65

At the time when Helene was founding her Institute, many other women were also establishing or had already founded their own congregations with the assistance of bishops or priests. Adèle-

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59 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate)

60 This was a common belief throughout the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965].

61 Cf. Helene de Chappotin, in *Mary of the Passion*, 444.

62 In *Mary of the Passion*, 444.


64 Marie Agnes de Saint Jean-Baptiste, in her letters to Helene, reprinted in *An Apostle Sent by God*, 222-253.

Euphrasie Barbier, [1829-1893] was born in France, and founded the Institute de Notre Dame des Missions, in Lyon, in 1861 with the assistance of Marist Fathers. According to their history, this Institute had “the express, but not exclusive, aim of working in the foreign missions.”

Like Helene, Euphrasie’s main concern was for women and girls.

Unlike the Daughters of Charity founded by Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, Helene never considered making annual vows. For Vincent, by making Perpetual Vows the Sisters would be bound by the rules of cloister, and Vincent wanted the Sisters out on the streets. Helene, though, knew that annual vows would not aid stability in remote mission territories where she intended to send her Sisters. Yet like the Daughters of Charity, Helene sent her Sisters beyond the Cloister whenever a need was recognised.

**Mission and Multicultural Communities**

When discerning a request from *Propaganda* or bishops for Sisters for a particular mission, Helene, as was said earlier, followed three basic principles:

…to assure the internationality of the group as a witness to the universal mission of the Institute; to have a sufficient number of sisters in order to form a real community even during the voyage which could have taken weeks or months; and finally, to see that the persons chosen complemented each other in their physical, technical and spiritual capacities.

Sometimes Apostolic Vicars and other missionaries preferred to have Sisters all of their own nationality. On one occasion when Helene was asked by a bishop to send Sisters only of his nationality to his area, she replied: “As regards the question of nationality…our Constitutions require that we be universal missionaries and they absolutely forbid us to go into local considerations…” Helene decisions was based on her aim to keep the Institute universal, and the communities with Sisters of various nationalities. Yet the universality of the Institute

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67 Ibid.
69 The cloister was the struggle experienced by the Australian foundation of the Sisters of St Joseph by Mary Mackillop as seen in *The Josephite Story*, quoted by Susan E Smith, *Women in Mission*, 129-132.
required that the Sisters cooperate with priests and religious of other dioceses and Orders, and this at times led to misunderstandings.

**Mission and Collaboration with Priests**

One saying of Helene’s which was frequently misunderstood is that the Sisters were to be “the humble auxiliaries of missionary priests.”\(^{72}\) This had on occasion been understood by some bishops and priests to mean that the Sisters were meant to cook and clean for them. Yet in her writings the context is quite clear: “Just as the Blessed Virgin accompanied Our Lord in Egypt and later during his apostolic journeys, so the Missionaries of Mary will dedicate themselves to the *apostolate* in the Mission as the humble auxiliaries of missionary priests.”\(^{73}\) The Sisters work beside the priest, and in fact can go to places where the priest cannot. As Helene once wrote: “The religious can enter where the missionary priest has no access. Her immediate action on the mothers of families and the young girls happily complements the influence of God’s minister, and favours the formation of the Christian family.”\(^{74}\)

**Mission “at home”**

‘Mission’ was seen as going out to others, giving one’s life, regardless of whether one remained within one’s own country or went abroad. This was the sisters’ way of expressing their ‘victim’ offering made at Perpetual Profession. The author, Angelyn Dries, wrote:

Mission thought before Vatican II employed Aristotelian and neo-Thomist language, which tended to stress “missions” as a geographic territory, church implantation or extension as the work of mission specialists, a one-way movement from Europe and North America toward other countries.\(^{75}\)

Wherever there was a need Helene found a missionary challenge for her Sisters, whether it was in a ‘mission country’ or within Europe or whether it was carrying out a traditional ‘missionary task.’ As can be seen, Helene believed in cultural adaptation and the inculturation of the Gospel without these terms being in use in her day.

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72 *First Constitutions*, #4.
73 *First Constitutions*, #5. Italics added.
74 Helene de Chappotin, in the first issue of the *Annals* 1886, in *The Century of Mary of the Passion*, 163.
Besides looking beyond Europe, Helene recognised the needs of many spiritually poor within Europe itself. She saw many examples of what she referred to as the ‘dechristianization’ of Europe. Much later in 1967, this was also a concern of Pope Paul VI:

This first proclamation is addressed especially to those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus, or to children. But, as a result of the frequent situations of dechristianization in our day, it also proves equally necessary for innumerable people who have been baptized but who live quite outside Christian life.\textsuperscript{76}

In 1901, reflecting on the events in Europe, Helene expressed her sadness that even among Catholics there was a serious lack of faith:

For a long time I have believed that this diminution of his (God’s) gift of faith is our great punishment…Jesus Crucified keeps on repeating to my heart that I should be surprised at nothing, should expect very little, since souls are now in the darkness of a terrible night, which among Catholics is like a tower of Babel, a terrifying punishment requiring victims.\textsuperscript{77}

Helene saw this victim offering in the light of the life of Mary of Nazareth: the silent, yet passionate dedication to offering Jesus-Love to the world.

\textit{Mary of Nazareth as Model for Mission – An Aspect of Helène’s Mission Theology}

Most of what Helene wrote about Mary of Nazareth as the model of this missionary life for all the Sisters to follow would more properly fit under the category of mission spirituality. However, Helene, like a number of foundresses of the nineteenth century, saw that Mary of Nazareth provided a theological basis for the way the Sisters lived out their mission.\textsuperscript{78} As Mary brought Jesus into the world, so the Sisters were to offer Jesus as the Good News to the world. For this reason, Helene maintained the importance of Mary of Nazareth by naming the Institute after her. She wrote: “Missionaries of Mary…should make them understand that their special vocation is to continue on earth the mission of the Blessed Virgin…”\textsuperscript{79} Speaking of Mary as the woman on whom the Sisters were to model their approach to others, Helene stated that Mary is the “most perfect imitator of her Divine Son”, and was “the perfect model of love’s response to

\textsuperscript{76} Paul VI, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}, #52.
\textsuperscript{77} Helene de Chappotin, letter of 6 June, 1901, in \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 445.
\textsuperscript{78} E.g., Our Lady of the Missions; Our Lady of the Cenacle; Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel; Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{First Constitutions}, #5.
God.” To remind the Sisters of the importance of Mary, each Sister took the name ‘Mary; Maria; Moira’ before her second name; e.g., Sr Mary Margaret…. 

In a letter to the Sisters in 1896 Helene wrote, encouraging them to follow the example of Mary and Francis:

Henceforth, let us be true Missionaries of the Most Blessed Virgin and of St Francis, let us continue the mission of Mary Immaculate here on earth. This sums up everything for us. In everything, everywhere and always, may our religious family be, like her, ‘the handmaid of the Lord’. 

Helene’s wish had been to have Mary as the “unique foundress and superior general of the Institute.” The Superior General was to be given the role of Vicar General, reminding the Sisters of their name: Missionaries of Mary. However, Propaganda did not permit Helene to speak of Mary as foundress and superior general of the Institute, and this reference had to be removed from the Constitutions. Yet this was a reflection of Helene’s mission theology: the Sisters were to carry out the Missio Dei just as Mary carried out the mission God had given to her.

Helene repeatedly called the Sisters to remember the words of Mary: ‘ecce’ and ‘fiat’, the response given to the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation: ecce: “Behold the handmaid” and fiat: “…your will be done” (Lk 1:38). These two phrases of Mary formed the basis of Helene’s vision, to live ‘mission’ as Mary of Nazareth had lived it. As Elizabeth Johnson, a current theologian, writing on Mary, shared:

Casting her lot with the future, she responds with courage…Luke’s innovation is meant to underscore Mary’s conscious and active faith as one who hears the word of God and keeps it. Here I am. Fiat. Her stance is one that affirms her own identity in the act of radical trust in God, based on a bedrock conviction that God is faithful.

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80 Helene de Chappotin, in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 98.
81 Cf. Constitutions #22, in The Spirit of the Institute, 42.
82 Helene de Chappotin, Letter to the Sisters, 14 May, 1896, in Mary of the Passion, 337.
83 Helene de Chappotin, in Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 98.
84 Ibid., 114.
85 Cf. Customs Book, I, in The Spirit of the Institute, 43.
86 Elizabeth A. Johnson, Truly Our Sister, 254.
Mission, then, for Helene was the radical gift of oneself following the example of Mary. She wrote: “They embrace the mixed life, because it was without ostentation, especially at Nazareth, that the Immaculate Virgin cooperated more than any other creature in the salvation of humanity wrought by her divine Son.” The hidden life of the Holy Family in Nazareth was an example frequently used by Helene to explain how the Sisters were to prepare for their future missionary life. By this ‘hidden life’ Helene meant the thirty or so years that Jesus lived at home, doing the ordinary things that a Jewish boy would have done at that time such as working with his father and learning his religious duties. The evangelist Luke perceives these early years as having been formative ones for Jesus: “Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people” (Lk 2:42). So also, Helene used this example as a guide for her own Sisters.

Using her reflection on the above passage of scripture from the Gospel according to Luke, Helene explained that the years of formation are to be a time for the Sisters to become strong in faith and thereby draw strength for the apostolate. This is the meaning behind Helene’s call for the Sisters to be contemplatives-in-action. “They are to seek in prayer the object of their apostolate, and in the apostolate the object of their prayer.” Her mission theology was thus based on the example of Mary as she offered Jesus Christ to the world.

A Franciscan Friar who had read many of Helene’s writings, wrote of her, saying: “Mary of the Passion had a very clear insight into the role of women in the works of evangelization. She grasped that salvation was be impossible without Mary, thus mission is impossible without women.”

**Helene’s Missionary Spirituality**

Helene reminded the Sisters that it was not the works alone which were important. In a conference given to the Sisters in 1882, Helene reminded them: “True apostleship has nothing to do with places... its role is not so much to create works as it is to bring Christ to them.”

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87 Plan, #4, in *Rome, My Spiritual Homeland*, 156.
88 First Constitutions, #7, 5.
89 Michel Hubaut OFM and Marie Thérèse de Maleissye FMM, *in* *L’Expérience de Dieu Source de la Mission, François d’Assise, Marie de la Passion*. (Editions Salvator: Mulhouse 1976), 57.
90 Quoted in *For the Mission and its Risks*, 21.
Based on her experience in India of the Sisters’ inadequate formation for missionary work, Helene wished the Sisters to be prepared spiritually as well as academically. Helene knew that all the activity in the world would be fruitless if the Sisters did not have the Spirit of God as their guide. Prayer was the most important basis for the life of the Sisters. Helene stated that “all the good that the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary may do in the Missions finds its source in their relationship with God.” Thus, the method which Helene offered her Sisters for this contemplative aspect of their vocation is the prayerful communing of Jesus with the Father: “…he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray” (Mt.14:23).

Various factors combined to bring about other aspects of Helene’s extensive theological, biblical and spiritual vision of the universal mission of the Church to which she felt called. This vision was influenced by the theology and spirituality in the Church at her time. As the historian Aubert recounts:

...in devotional habits...a profound and lasting change had taken place during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The austere and undemonstrative piety characteristic of the preceding generations, confined in practice to an elite, gave way to a piety more accessible to the masses and giving greater scope, because of its stress on a multiplicity of exterior devotions and on frequent attendance of the sacraments, to emotional participation.

The spirituality Helene practised was characterized by numerous devotions of her day, such as to the Sacred Heart, to Mary of Nazareth, and to the Blessed Sacrament. This spirituality was formed through years of experience, firstly in the home where Helene’s family treasured these devotions. A special devotion of Helene’s was to the Holy Family. This she expressed clearly in having the inscription on each Sister’s ring: “Handmaid of Jesus, Mary, Joseph.”

As noted in Chapter Two, the spirituality Helene experienced as a Reparatrice Sister was based on the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola. St Ignatius called his followers to be ‘contemplatives in action’ as explained by one of his followers:

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91 Cf. Chapter Two, “The Reparatrice Sisters in India.”
92 In A Reading of the Constitutions, 143, CT 2/11.
93 In Helene de Chappotin’s “Meditations” no.705.
94 Cf. Aubert et al. The church in a Secularised Society, 117.
95 Cf. Chapter One.
96 Helene de Chappotin, “Customs Book I,” in The Spirit of the Institute, 44.
Being a contemplative in action means that your active life feeds your contemplative life and your contemplative life informs your active life. That is what contemplation in action means, and the cycle never ends.

The contemplative aspect of religious life is not static, as Franciscan Richard Rohr wrote in a recent book: “The contemplative’s repose is not a passive state but an engaged, silent receptivity...” Helene articulated this same idea when she wrote: “The missionary life must be both active and contemplative. Without prayer we can have no good influence over souls...” The Sisters were to be missionaries, victims, and adorers of God in the Blessed Sacrament. In Helene’s mind these three aspects of their vocation were intimately connected. She then explained her understanding of the offering of oneself as a victim: “The Institute must be the soul of the Priesthood, since it offers itself as a victim for the Church and for sinners.” Helene then explained further what this offering of oneself as a victim was: “This mission must be accomplished unobtrusively by means of prayer, devotedness, humility and submission.”

Helene had experienced the necessity of a spiritual guide but realised this would not always be possible in the distant mission fields. Thus, when writing about the contemplative life and the experience of God, she said:

The souls need this Jesus who says: ‘Do not fear.’ On coming down from the mountain, these souls need to be guided. In going up the mountain, Jesus said nothing to them, but when they return after this grace, they need guidance. This gospel could serve even much better than St Teresa’s well as a basis for a treatise on contemplative prayer.
As mentioned previously, besides the Franciscan Friars Fr Bernardino and Raphael who guided her, Helene also met many other Franciscans, including Friar Frederic, OFM, who impressed her very much. He was a missionary, having been in Jerusalem and Canada and was said to have performed miracles. Helene also welcomed spiritual advice from members of other Orders. Helene also wanted her Sisters to be enriched by the spirituality of other Congregations. She invited diocesan and religious priests of different congregations to give conferences to the Sisters to expand their spirituality. Fr Raphael Delarbre OFM gave weekly conferences to the Sisters in Rome, and one of Helene’s nephews, a Dominican, frequently gave talks to the community in Rome. Priests were invited to address the communities when they were visiting, e.g., in the novitiate in France or the community in Rome. One such visitor was Bishop Bonjean of Colombo. Helene herself, during her visits to the novitiate at Les Chatelets in France and when in Rome, frequently gave spiritual talks to the Sisters.

Besides guiding Helene, both Fr Bernardino and Fr Raphael assisted many of the other FMM Sisters in their spirituality, either personally or by letter. Fr Bernardino was also spiritual advisor to a number of Poor Clare Sisters, and was instrumental in establishing three Congregations of women religious: the Franciscans of Mary Immaculate, the Sisters of Notre Dame de la Mission, and the Sisters of Notre Dame du Temple.

Helene retained the practice of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament she experienced as a Marie Reparatrice with the aim of making reparation for the “profanations especially against the Eucharist.” This practice of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed was common at the time. As noted earlier, Euphrasie Barbier, foundress of the Our Lady of the Missions Congregation, also repeated these sentiments. She also spoke of the satanic impiety which “…perverts and ruins our dear France, nay entire Europe…blaspheming more than ever Your Holy Name…” Visits to the Blessed Sacrament were seen as a desire to keep Jesus, the ‘prisoner of love’ in the tabernacle, company. Helene expressed to her Sisters this role of Mary accompanying Jesus:

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105 Cf. Chapter Three.
107 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 70, 73.
...if amidst the splendours of Heaven where she is reigning, Mary could have a single regret, it would be that she were not on earth prostrate before the tabernacle there to adore unceasingly the Prison of love.\textsuperscript{114}

Helene also begged her Sisters:

Listen to the assurance which I give you in the name of God: the Virgin Mary has raised up her Missionaries, victim adorers of the most Blessed Sacrament, to appeal to the mercy of her Son and to hold back his avenging arm whilst drawing down a new effusion of the reign of Jesus.\textsuperscript{115}

In writing to the Sisters regarding the practice of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Helene said: “The great missionary of the Institute is Jesus exposed and adored. The power of the Eucharist and of prayer combined with action for the conversion of peoples, has not been understood well enough...”\textsuperscript{116} Again in 1891 she wrote: “Adoration is Jesus in the Eucharist who prays in our home, with us...”\textsuperscript{117} The attitude the Sisters were to take was that they be “New Esthers...before the King of Kings, pleading for mercy.”\textsuperscript{118} Helene saw the Blessed Sacrament as “the treasure which the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary carried with them wherever they were called.”\textsuperscript{119} Helene explained the importance of this aspect of the charism, saying, “...during adoration as at the Eucharistic celebration, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary are in the full glory of their mission and enable the world to communicate with the grace of the Tabernacle.”\textsuperscript{120} Exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament “in places where Our Lord is least adored and least known” reminds the Sisters that prayer is of the utmost importance to the vocation of a missionary: “...evangelisation through action must be the consequence of a life of prayer...”\textsuperscript{121} Helene’s prayer expressed her utter devotion to making Christ known: “Make my heart and the Institute a flame of fire enkindling the earth.”\textsuperscript{122} Helene

\textsuperscript{114} Helene de Chappotin, Customs Book, quoted in The Spirit of the Institute, 52.
\textsuperscript{115} Helene de Chapotin, Letter of 18 January 1892 to all the Sisters, in Circulars and Official Letters to the Institute. 1877-1904, 50.
\textsuperscript{116} Letter of 18 December, 1888, in For the Mission and its Risks, 31.
\textsuperscript{117} Letter of 8 May, 1891, in For the Mission and its Risks, 32.
\textsuperscript{118} In the letter of 16 May, 1883, in The Spirit of the Institute, 57, and letter of 19 October, 1904, in Mary of the Passion, 554.
\textsuperscript{119} From the Customs Book of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Vol. I, n.160, quoted in An Apostle Sent by God, 75.
\textsuperscript{120} Helene de Chappotin, “Letter to the Sisters,” (CT/1, 28; NS, 40).
\textsuperscript{121} Helene de Chappotin, in Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 92.
\textsuperscript{122} Helene de Chappotin, in A Mother’s Journal to Her Daughters, Letter of 18 December, 1888.
continued: “The Eucharist sustains the world... To be a missionary is to consecrate one’s life to guide new adorers to the Lord.”  

The ‘Mission Booklet’ prepared by a team of the Sisters as a theological resource for the Institute, states: “The rediscovery of the contemplative dimension of missionary spirituality appears to be one of the emerging elements in mission in the third millennium...our Missionary Spirituality has always been contemplative and its development is directly rooted in the development of the charism...”

Pope John Paul II, in his homily on the occasion of Helene’s beatification, expressed the union of the two aspects of contemplation and action: “At the heart of the missionary commitment, she placed prayer and the Eucharist, because for her, adoration and mission blended to become the same work.” The Pope continued, speaking of Helene’s basis for her spirituality: “Drawing on Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, combining a mystical and an active vocation, passionate and intrepid, she gave herself with an intuitive and bold readiness to the universal mission of the Church.”

Thus, the Sisters’ spirituality was to be formed and nourished by contemplative prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Their hours spent in the chapel were to be part of their ordinary daily routine as missionaries. To deepen their spirituality, Helene’s constant plea to her Sisters was to read the New Testament daily:

> In order to keep the spirit of Faith alive within us, and in those who surround us, we shall nourish our souls by the daily reading of the Gospel. If we wish to enjoy the gift of God, let us read the holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I recommend to my daughters a very special love of the New Testament, and they will do well to read a few verses daily.

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123 Letters of Helene reprinted in *The Century of Mary of the Passion*, 162.
126 Ibid.


*Spiritual Writings of Helene*

The experience in India of certain confessors wanting the Sisters to go against their consciences made Helene cautious.\(^{128}\) For this reason she wrote her own ‘meditations’ and retreat guidelines for the Sisters so that they would not be too dependent upon priests for spiritual guidance.\(^{129}\)

Helene also knew that there would be little spiritual reading available in the remote mission centres, and so wrote numerous spiritual reflections for the Sisters. For example, after studying the scriptures and examples of the lives of the saints, she wrote *Meditations* for the Sisters for each day of the year. She based her writings on Dom Gueranger’s *The Liturgical Year*,\(^{130}\) and the Franciscan Friar Leon de Clary’s *L’aureole Seraphique*.\(^{131}\) Helene added her own reflections and suggestions in these *Meditations*. In her *Meditations* for the feast of the Epiphany, Helene reiterated the aim of the Institute:

> On this feast...our Saviour said to the gentiles: Come to me. On this feast the Franciscan Missionary of Mary celebrates the foundation of her Institute...the little flock which is to prolong the Epiphany, saying to the gentiles: Come to Christ.\(^{132}\)

After reading the *Meditations*, the Minister General of the Friars Minor wrote to Helene:

> Apart from drawing from the liturgy and Franciscan hagiography, you have found in your long experience of missionary life and in your maternal heart wise counsels for all your daughters, and the applications to be made of them in the tasks and the multiple trials of their beautiful but difficult vocation.\(^{133}\)

These meditations were also of benefit to lay persons. Georges Decurtins, a sociologist and a member of the Swiss Parliament,\(^{134}\) encountered the *Meditations* in a German translation. He wrote to the Provincial Superior of Italy and Austria:

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128 Cf. Chapter Two.
129 Cf. below, *Spiritual Writings of Helene*.
130 Rev. Dom Prosper Guéranger, Abbot of Solesmes, *The Liturgical Year*. [http://www.liturgialatina.org/lityear/](http://www.liturgialatina.org/lityear/) (accessed 17 May, 2012). This was a popular and important source for religious communities from the late 19th century until Vatican II.
…I have become persuaded of the great value and eminent usefulness of the Meditations of your Mother Superior General. It is a profound and purely ecclesiastic piety that speaks in this work…your Mother Superior General unites true love of neighbour and forgetfulness of self; her faith is active; it is like the sun on a beautiful day of Spring, the sun whose warmth is full of life. And all is so virile, so healthy, not sickly and sentimental…

Helene also wrote various biographies, among them that of a novice, Mere Marie du Bon Conseil, who died very young; of St Paschal Baylon, a Franciscan lay brother (1540-1592) who had a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament; and of St Anthony of Padua (1192-1231), a Portuguese priest who became a Franciscan Friar and popular preacher, especially in Italy. This latter biography sold sixty-five thousand copies within fifteen years, and had five editions. Following the martyrdom of seven Sisters in China in 1900, Helene wrote a biography of each of them also. At the end of that book Helene spoke of the three martyrdoms, the total gift of one’s life to God: poverty, care of persons with Hansen’s disease, and the martyrdom of blood. Helene presented a copy of this book to Pope Pius X on 9 January, 1904. Helene wrote of the encounter: “The pope asked me: ‘How many houses do you have?’ I replied: ‘About 80, but most of them are far away in China, Mongolia, in the middle of Africa, in North America’.”

Helene also wrote a biography of Friar Bernardino of Portogruaro, which the Sisters published in 1909, after Helene’s death. All of these writings were of great spiritual assistance for the Sisters and gave great insight into the mind and heart of their Foundress. Yet all of these writings were in French and were required to be translated in each community. The prayers of the Church were in Latin, as was the Prayers of the Hours, called the Office. These were not translated until after the Second Vatican Council, and proved to be an obstacle to the non-European Sisters.

As already mentioned, spreading the love of God was Helene’s every thought: “The missionary spark is the love of what is good; it is the glory of God which embraces the whole world…

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135 Georges Decurtins, in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 175.
137 Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 177.
138 There are three copies of this book in the Sisters’ library in their motherhouse in Rome. Vie de la Mère Marie-Hermine de Jésus et de ses Compagnes, massacrées au Chan-Si, (Chine) le 9 Juillet 1900. There are 577 pages in this book, 39 chapters, forty photographs, and includes an account of their martyrdom along with that of two bishops and many Chinese martyrs).
139 Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 538.
God is so great!” She repeatedly called on the Sisters to pray that the Reign of God might come. By this Reign of God, Helene meant that the love of God for the whole of humanity would be recognised and reciprocated by everyone. Helene wrote of this joy in her personal reflections: “I saw love, truth, unity. I saw that to live one is to live the other. The happiness of being one with one’s God is a heaven; to share this happiness with others is a heaven even nearer still to heaven.”

Summary

Helene’s vast experience of religious life expanded her understanding of mission theology and the spirituality needed to sustain the missionary. Helene wrote numerous reflections to ensure the Sisters’ access to spiritual resources. This was intended to ensure the Sisters’ continued growth in their relationship with God wherever they were missioned. These writings were invaluable to the Sisters in distant missions where there is little or no literature available for their spiritual nourishment. In all her writings, Helene stressed the importance of Mary of Nazareth as the first model of a missionary for the Sisters, offering Jesus as God’s gift of love to the world. She also quoted the writings of St Francis and other Franciscans to nourish her Sisters.

Aspects of the missiology of the nineteenth century which Helene accepted were that Catholicism was the one true religion and that the European culture was the standard for all peoples. Helene retained these beliefs yet did not agree with proselytism; rather she believed that the witness of one’s life would attract others to Christ. She saw the best way of reflecting this was to have international and intercultural communities as witnesses to the universal call to the knowledge and love of Christ. In having this as a goal she followed the Reparatrice model of mixed nationalities in their communities.

The following chapter will outline the further development of the Institute as the Sisters established foundations in numerous parts of the world. It will show the manner in which the Sisters put into practice the specific mission theology and spirituality they inherited from their Foundress.

141 Helene de Chappotin, in a Journal of a Mother to Her Daughters, 11 February, 1896, 43.
142 Cf. e.g., Helene de Chappotin, Meditations, 755; Journal of a Mother to Her Daughters, 529, 659; Spiritual Notes, 184.
143 Helene de Chappotin, He Speaks to Me in the Heart of His Church, 33.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Development of the Institute

The Institute Develops Roots

Helene’s aim for the Institute was that it not to be tied down to one particular work. This would leave the Sisters free to respond to any need they encountered anywhere in the world. Helene understood her missionary responsibility, like many other religious women of her era, was to respond to the needs as she discovered them:

Women religious were at one with the many other socially committed 19th century women who sought, with a new public visibility and more effective avenues of outreach, to serve social needs and bring alleviation to crying forms of distress. At the heart of their service, for many of these women of whatever religious denomination, was a sense of Christian dedication and commitment to the relief of suffering and injustice.¹

Helene’s motivation was the Franciscan Gospel way of life as seen in Saints Francis and Clare. The ministries Helene established generally corresponded to those accepted for religious women of the day; for instance, nursing, teaching and caring for needy women and children. However, when the need arose, the Sisters responded, such as nursing smallpox patients, those with the plague and leprosy sufferers, regardless of their gender or religion. The Sisters set up sewing schools for young girls who were on the streets, took in refugees, and visited prisoners. In all of these works, the Sisters sought the co-operation of lay people. Lay persons were also encouraged to take up their responsibility as Christians. In this way the Sisters were able to work beside them in the various ministries. The movement for lay involvement goes back to 1874, as Duncan writes: “The Catholic mass organisations grew out of the Catholic Congresses held from 1874 to aid the Vatican in its struggle with the Italian State, and were firmly under clerical control.”² These movements were directly involved in political activities, but later split into two groups: one mainly for university students with a focus on temporal and spiritual ends. The other remained political in its direction.³ Helene became involved, encouraging women to learn a trade and to teach other

¹ MacGinley, A Dynamic of Hope, 336.
² Duncan, The Church’s Social Teaching, 114-115.
³ Ibid., 115.
women. This recognition of the importance of lay persons’ involvement in the mission of the Church was later stressed by Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical praising Catholic Action in Italy, *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*.

After arriving in Rome, Helene was introduced to a number of chaplains and members of religious Orders, many of whom became frequent visitors to the Sisters’ community in Rome. Amongst the various visitors was the private secretary of Leo XIII, Mgr. Gabriele Bocali. On a number of occasions he had facilitated audiences for Helene and the Sisters with the Pope.

The Sisters set about learning Italian as quickly as they could. Helene and the Sisters soon became aware of the numerous very poor inhabitants in the city. Seeing the great need of so many people, they were able to take some action on behalf of them. The cause of the desperate plight of many people in nineteenth century Italy has been explained as follows:

The land, the food and the people were all shaped by warfare, struggle and the desire for independence. Most of the men who fought for freedom during this period were peasants, seeking a chance for something better. Northern Italy, mostly under direct influence of Austria and the House of Savoy saw the emergence of industry; however life was hard for most Italians, who remained poor. Southern Italy fared worse than the North: neglect and the oppression of wealthy European landlords who exploited local peasants to tend their lands, created the basis for the later Mafia organizations.

The Sisters, then, went beyond the bounds of Rome itself, going to other needy towns in Italy, such as Grottaferrata, Assisi, Florence and in the mountain area of Tyrol, all by 1891, within fourteen years of their founding.

Despite the various activities of the Sisters, Helene continued to keep them up to date with world and local events through her reading of the various newspapers available in Rome. Her

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4 Cf. below, "Emphasis on Education."  
6 From the house journal of St Helen’s convent, in *Rome, My Spiritual Homeland*, 74. Some of the visitors within the first three months were Hoy Spirit Fathers, Capuchin Franciscans and Franciscans of the Observance (OFM), Passionist Fathers, Christian Brothers, and Canons Regular of St John Lateran.  
spiritual director, Fr Raphael, forwarded to Helene any items of news and papal writings he himself received from the Vatican. Evidence of the knowledge of recent Encyclicals can be seen in Helene’s warnings against “Protestants, Jews and Masons.” Helene is repeating what she has read of the popes condemnations in their Encyclicals.

When able to do so, Helene wrote a daily Journal for the Sisters spread throughout the world using the documents and various snippets of information. She included such items as she considered important: “She formed herself and others to be open, taking inspiration from the Bible and from St. Francis, analyzing the events of the day in this light.” This was so that the Sisters would be aware of what was happening in the world and could pray for the needs of others.

With the improvement in transportation at the end of the nineteenth century due especially to the steam engine, there came an increase in the number of pilgrims to Rome. Helene was very intent on encouraging the spirituality of the laity at every opportunity. She opened the doors of the convent in Rome to accommodate as many pilgrims as possible. When the convent was not able to provide enough room for them, Helene rented vacant houses nearby. The Sisters prepared the beds and fed the pilgrims:

...the community had begun another type of apostolate, which would develop, that of welcoming pilgrims...in that first little house where they were ‘as poor as Job’...the Journal (of the house) does not say where the Sisters of the community slept.

At one time a group of 200 pilgrims came from France, and more than 500 from Portugal. As seen previously, many of the pilgrims were workers. Besides pilgrims, Helene was also

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9 Helene de Chappotin, letter of 25 January, 1895, in Mary of the Passion, 510.
13 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 75.
14 From Sr Marie de Sainte Catherine de Sienne’s memoirs, in Rome, My Spiritual Homeland, 307, and Letter dated 10 May, 1900, in A Mother’s Journal to Her Daughters Years 1900-1901, 26.
15 de Maleissye, FMM, The Century of Mary of the Passion, 166.
very concerned for refugees and had many housed in the convent in Rome. Following Helene’s example, for some time a number of Armenians who had survived the 1915 massacre in Turkey stayed in the house in Rome. Helene had deemed the urgency to assist these people to temporarily relax the requirement of the Enclosure.

Helene arranged for the Sisters to provide soup and bread for the poor and hungry through their house in Rome. This practice is still being continued today. The community also began working for the rehabilitation of women prisoners. Another work which Helene enthusiastically accepted was for the promotion of young working women within the organisation, the Laboratorio Fides: “the Preservation of the Faith”:

The Preservation of the Faith is an association founded to combat Protestant proselytism in the Eternal City, and to preserve from its attacks and their own weakness the poor, wavering souls whom the lure of gain or the daily temptations of extreme poverty make easy prey. This crusading work to preserve the faith among our Catholics enjoyed the full encouragement of the Sovereign Pontiffs.

The president of this work in 1902 was Mgr Adami. At that time he asked Helene if the Sisters would take charge of one of the workrooms which employed twenty young women. Under the Sisters’ direction, this workroom evolved to provide employment for 75 young women, and expanded to care of their families as well. Helene had based the Sisters’ participation on her practice of programs she used in her other workrooms for women in other parts of Europe.

Whilst many of the services provided by the Sisters in Italy and other European nations were not specifically ‘missionary’ in the understanding of the time, Helene did not hesitate to respond to whatever need she encountered. For Helene ‘mission’ was wherever there was a need. As one of her Sisters explained:

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16 Quoted in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 357-359.
19 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 470.
20 Ibid.
22 Cf. below, *Professional Formation*. 
The Institute, according to the orientation given by the Pope himself, being destined for missionary activity “ad extra”, could not specialise in the ministry for migrants who, at that time, did not come from the so-called missionary territories; but that did not prevent Mary of the Passion from being deeply interested in their lot and seizing every opportunity possible to come to their help.23

Orphanages were a service Helene was very keen to provide. She saw the rights of children as paramount. These rights were basic, and not only children without parents were in the Sisters’ care. Helene wrote of “a frightening moral disorder…”24 the result of the changes with societies which disrupted family life and seriously affected the children. As explained by one of the Sisters: “The purpose of orphanages was to welcome children whose families, for various reasons, could not accomplish their task of formation.”25

The ability to assist those in need depended upon the formation of the Sisters in the required fields. Helene ensured the education of the Sisters in various professions.

**Professional Formation**

Besides the spiritual formation of the Sisters,26 Helene also saw to it that the Sisters were trained professionally at all levels for whatever works with which they were involved. She believed that the Sisters’ talents should be developed, such as in music, drawing and languages, which could render valuable service in the mission areas. She set up houses where these gifts could be developed as well as other basic subjects such as management and mathematics. Some of such houses were founded in Paris (1886), in Gooreind in Belgium (1895), Lyon (1900) in France, and in Fribourg in Switzerland (1902).27 Helene also accepted foundations in England so that the Sisters could learn English for the apostolate in English speaking countries such as the British Isles and India.28 When planning to have a house in Budapest, Hungary, Helene first of all found an apartment for four Sisters so that they could

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23 Cf. Anne de la Bouliere, FMM, article quoting Helene de Chappotin, “I would wish to help all those who suffer.”
26 Cf. Chapter Four, “Missionary Spirituality.”
28 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 204.
learn the local language before they began any ministry.\textsuperscript{29} When it was appropriate, the Sisters were to take the official examinations in their particular fields, such as teaching and nursing.\textsuperscript{30} In this way the Sisters could obtain permission to enter various countries.

Besides Helene, other foundresses also stressed the importance of an adequate professional formation. For instance, Mary Josephine Rogers [1882-1995] who founded the Maryknoll Sisters in 1912 also established an institution for the academic formation of her sisters. Initially the Maryknoll Sisters were the cooks and cleaners for the Maryknoll Fathers. The Maryknoll Sisters eventually undertook their own missionary ventures.\textsuperscript{31}

In order to facilitate good communication between the Sisters, Helene asked that they learn English, French and Italian, and the language of the people to whom they were sent.\textsuperscript{32} She emphasised the importance of speaking the local language during prayer so that the local people could participate, and expressed her delight when she learnt that “a sermon had been preached in Chinese in the Sisters’ chapel at Chefoo [China] and in good Saulteaux of Manitoba, Canada.”\textsuperscript{33}

The Sisters were encouraged to study the aspects of the local cultures and conform themselves wherever possible to the local customs. For instance, when thinking of the orphans for whom the Sisters cared, Helene asked the Sisters to act with great kindness and consideration for their specific lifestyles:

…the atmosphere, the style of life, the formation to agricultural work, cottage industry and work in the house, in a word everything, should conform to local customs in such a way that no young person would feel disoriented when she returned to her own home, as if the fact of being a Christian or of being educated in a Christian milieu had obliged her to renounce the customs of her people.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Alini and Foujols, FMM, \textit{An Apostle Sent by God}, 113.
\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{31} Cf. Smith, \textit{Women in Mission}, 141, 143.
\textsuperscript{32} First Constitutions, #17.
\textsuperscript{33} Alini and Foujols, FMM, \textit{An Apostle Sent by God}, 113. (\textit{Saulteaux} is the correct spelling of this name today.) The Saulteaux peoples are located on the southern rim of the Subarctic of Canada. They prefer the names Ojibway or Anishinabe, because ‘Saulteaux’ was the name given to them by Europeans. Cf. “Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples.” http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/encyclopedia/a-z/a4/7 (accessed 27 April, 2014).
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 114.
Besides the Sisters learning the local languages, they also set up printing presses in many countries so that bible stories and catechisms would be available in the local dialects. Grammars and lexicons were printed as a means of allowing newcomers to learn the languages with greater ease. The printing presses became also a means of preserving the local languages. This also allowed for safeguarding many of the cultures which would otherwise have been lost forever. Helene established printing presses in France and Belgium so that the Sisters could learn the trade. Later, they built printing presses in the Congo, China and Canada, and then taught the people how to build them themselves. They also trained the local people to print and bind, thus giving employment as well as education to them. As the current website of the Indian Sisters states, Helene “…set the trend for us to utilize the potent means of the media to communicate the compassionate face of God to all peoples thereby promoting communion and human relationships.”

Helene’s reputation became so widespread that in 1902 she was approached by the President of the Council of Fribourg who asked if she would take over the responsibility for the direction of the technical college, a professional branch of the University of Fribourg. Helene was delighted. She saw this as a benefit for their future mission work. She wrote: “When in each house we have a graduate from the Technicum, or at least one of her pupils, we shall have a unique situation in the missions for orphanages, technical schools, and workrooms.”

In 1903 the Sisters went to Ireland following a request to assist the poor in their desperate situation. Bishop Clancy of Sligo in Ireland had met the FMM Sisters in Antwerp and saw how they were training women in various crafts. He asked Helene for Sisters for his diocese so that the women would not be forced to seek employment overseas. Helene shared the bishop’s aim:

…to open…a modern Agricultural Centre together with a rural Domestic Economy School, carpet-weaving and lace-making workrooms aimed at helping the young Irish women to remain in their homes which poverty was forcing them to leave, and so to prevent them from emigrating to America.

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35 Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 205.
37 de Maleissye, Century of Mary of the Passion, 163.
38 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 530.
The Agricultural Board established by the bishop to oversee the work provided more than the Sisters hoped for: “Embroidery frames, sewing machines, agricultural machinery, horses, cows, pigs, hens…soon 130 girls were at work…”39

**Initial Foundations**

**Care of Lepers**

Leprosy was a common affliction in Helene’s time, and the only treatment was isolation and management of the wounds and disabilities of the sufferers. Helene received almost daily requests for foundations, which necessitated the refusal of many appeals for help due to the lack of Sisters. Yet proposals which Helene called too beautiful to refuse were those which were for the most dangerous or distant missions, or requests for Sisters to care for lepers. Helene wrote regarding care of those suffering from leprosy: “It seems to be that this ministry will be special to our Institute…”40 She added that she would never refuse a request to go to a leprosarium, no matter what trouble it would cause her.41 Helene saw this calling as imitating the “respectful tenderness of St Francis for the lepers…”42

Many other Christian denominations were also responding to the needs of the sufferers of leprosy. In 1873, a Lutheran couple from Ireland, Wellesley Bailey [1846-1937] and his wife Alice, saw the suffering of the leprosy-affected people in north-western India. Help for people affected by leprosy was unheard of at the time43 and so they undertook to raise awareness of the disease. They began a speaking ministry, telling people about the needs of the leprosy patients they had met. In 1874, they established ‘Mission to Lepers.’44 This organisation is today known as “The Leprosy Mission.” *The Leprosy Mission Australia* is one of thirty-one member countries, which make up the Global Fellowship of this international organisation.45 Helene would not have heard of this mission to lepers as the Reparatrice Sisters were in

41 Ibid., 133.
42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
southern India, and communication services were extremely limited. There is no record of any cases of leprosy in the Jesuit mission of Madurai during the Sisters time there.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Emphasis on Education}

Helene, like many other religious women of her day, saw the need for and the great value of education. She wrote: “Education and reading have opened new horizons to ordinary people...”\textsuperscript{47} She also recognized that as mothers are the first and principal educators of the family and can have a positive influence on their society as well. As noted previously, education was not open for girls generally until well into the nineteenth century. In previous centuries the education of girls was not considered at all necessary by many Church officials as well as local authorities. Yet there were a few exceptions. In 1565 the then Cardinal in Milan, Italy, Charles Borromeo, encouraged Angela Merici, foundress of the Ursuline Sisters, in her work of educating girls. He saw the benefit it provided for the girls to be able to understand their Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{48} For this reason, many Religious Congregations of women concentrated on the education of both girls and boys.\textsuperscript{49}

Many of the women who had been educated by the Sisters later began their own businesses, such as “hotels, nursing homes, dressmaking businesses, shops and even farms.”\textsuperscript{50} Whilst the term ‘feminist’ was not in use in Helene’s era, she was certainly a feminist, when feminism is defined as “anyone, of either gender, who believes in dignity, justice and equality for all people...”\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[46] Records for cases in Madurai 1991 to 1994 showed 49 cases: “In 2012, more than half of new leprosy cases diagnosed globally were found on India (134,752 out of 232,857).” http://mahelerecen.50webs.com/problem%20exploration.html (accessed 19 May, 2017).
\item[47] Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 514, 515.
\item[48] Cf. MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope}, 27.
\item[49] Cf. Chapter One.
\item[50] MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope}, 338.
\end{footnotes}
**Other Ministries**

Other common ministries of the Sisters were catechism classes and youth formation centres. Expressing her concern for young people, Helene said:

> We Catholics have neglected our young people too much at the most decisive moment of their lives. After having watched over them and protected them in our primary schools, we go and abandon them at the very moment when they are beginning to spread their wings and make their mark on society.\(^{52}\)

Whatever the work, however, Helene wanted her Sisters to develop a close relationship with those they served, regardless of creed or background, asking the Sisters to “nurse all the sick without distinction of creed, trying to make them appreciate Christianity. You show them the way, then or later on, of conversion.”\(^ {53}\)

Helene followed the example of St Francis of Assisi when sending the Sisters to countries where another religion dominated. When advising his brothers to live peacefully amongst the peoples, preaching by their way of life, saying: ‘On occasion, it may be even necessary to use words.’ Although these words do not appear in his writings they have been attributed to St Francis. These words capture Francis’ respectful approach to the Muslims he encountered during the Fifth Crusade. Francis was strongly opposed to the Crusades. During that particular Crusade Francis and a companion travelled to Egypt and entered into the Muslim camp. They were taken to the Sultan and spent some time there in dialogue with him.\(^{54}\) Upon returning to Europe, St Francis requested the Brothers that, when going to Muslim lands, they “not engage in arguments but be subject to every human creature for God’s sake.”\(^{55}\) He added that, only when it seemed according to God’s will, they could acknowledge that they were Christians.\(^ {56}\)

The witness of the Sisters’ love and service in Muslim lands were to be the most effective means, and usually the only one, of preaching the Good News. This same respectful approach was much later advocated by Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, of 8

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\(^{56}\) Ibid.
December, 1975: “The evangelical witness of the religious life clearly manifests... the primacy of the love of God.”

Helene was aware that not all the Sisters would be able to go to distant lands; some would be required to remain in Europe for the formation of new members and other services to the Institute. She encouraged those who remained, however, to understand that they also were true missionaries:

Mission is anywhere. You know that David decided that those who had watched over the baggage merited an equal reward with those who fought, because, as members of the same army though they had not fought they had however contributed to the victory.

The situation of all marginalised peoples, particularly those with Hansen’s disease, was of great concern to Helene. However, she considered the spiritually poor whom she saw in many European countries as the “saddest of all the sadnesses of the earth.” It is clear then why Helene strongly desired works by which the Sisters could give spiritual as well as material assistance to people, such as spiritual retreats. Helene considered this work as basic to the aim of the Institute. She wrote: “I could ask for nothing better than to have three or four Sisters experienced in this work…this idea has haunted my soul for a long time.” The work of spiritual guidance through retreat-giving was to be directed to the needs of each person; it was to offer “wise and prudent direction to each one, which would suit her character, and her family and social situation.” Thus Helene extended the support beyond just the women but to their families as well.

Helene retained this perception of the importance of the spiritual formation and direction of women from her time with the Reparatrice Sisters. In this she agreed with other foundresses who were also concerned for the spiritual life of women. In France for instance, in 1826, Therese Couderc and Father Stephen founded the Congregation of Our Lady of the Retreat in

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57 Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, #1.
58 Helene de Chappotin, in a letter of 29 December, 1900, in which she informed all the Sisters of the martyrdom of the seven Sisters in China, in Circular Letters, 91.
59 Alini and Foujols, FMM, An Apostle Sent by God, 129.
60 Ibid., 150.
61 Ibid., 151.
the Cenacle. This Congregation is centred on the spiritual care of women, especially using the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius.62

_Health Care for the Sisters Themselves_

Wanting a place for sick Sisters to recover, Helene found a property in Fribourg, Switzerland, that was very suitable. However, at the time, the Swiss authorities did not admit any religious communities which had not been present before the Federal Constitution was proclaimed in 1874. Helene was advised by the local Bishop to “go in your habits… and if the Federal Council accepts you, you shall have my consent too.”63 The Sisters not only received permission to open the house but one of the Councillors himself, Mr Ruchonnet, a Protestant, promised them his protection.64

_Welcoming Local Vocations_

In 1888 Helene began to prepare for those women in countries outside of Europe who wanted to enter the Institute. Women from non-European countries who wished to join the Institute were seen by Helene as needing special preparation. These women would have been first-generation Catholics and therefore would require a longer period of formation than women of European descent. Helene organised this through the establishment of a separate formation program, and called these women, Oblate Sisters.

Helene explained that the “formation of native religious is part of the spirit of the Institute.”65 Helene wanted to “encourage all the spontaneity, all the initiatives, all the vocations which place the soul of the native woman at the service of Christ.”66 These Sisters “were destined to work as pioneers of mission in their own countries where western Sisters could only be established with difficulty, in accord with the desire and action of the Church!”67 Her initial idea was to have the women come to Europe for their formation:

63 Bishop Mermillod of Lausanne, quoted in _Mary of the Passion_, 213.
64 Recounted by one of the Sisters, in _Mary of the Passion_, 213.
65 Printed in the 1886 issue of the _Annals_, and reprinted in _An Apostle sent by God_, 116.
66 Helene de Chappotin, _Actes de la Congregation Generale des Franciscaines Missionnaires de Marie_, 1903, #60.
67 Private paper of the FMM, “1932-1960 FMM.”
Mary of the Passion wished that vocations from all over the world could come to Rome, the centre of the Institute, or to Les Chatelets, in order to imbibe better the FMM ideal with its universal dimension, and return to give it a new impetus in their own countries. 68

However, Helene later recognized the difficulties experienced by candidates on leaving their homeland to go to Rome or France for their formation. The adaptation to the language, climate, and food of a European city placed a serious burden on these women. 69 Not deterred by these difficulties, Helene began the formation of a separate group of women who would remain within their own countries and not be bound by the cloister or the requirement of the rule of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This would free them to go amongst their own people to minister to them. 70 There were three stages of formation for these women: they were initially to be secular members of the Third Order of St Francis, then Associates, and finally, Oblates (External Sisters). 71 As Helene explained to the Archbishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka: “In the Institute they will have the degree of Sisters of the Exterior.” 72 Helene explained this process during the General Congregation in 1903:

In 1903 the General Chapter presided over by Mother Foundress took another step forward. Acting on the reports from the Provincials and the advice of the Missionary Bishops, as well as on the keen desire to fulfil the legitimate desires of the Associates themselves, it was decided that they should wear a religious habit and be admitted to pronounce vows which should be renewed yearly. 73

A significant difficulty in establishing the Oblates in India was the caste system. A similar system existed in Burma. The Caste system in India was hierarchical, and divided into four main categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. However, there were others who were not even recognised within the least of that system: the Dalits or the untouchables. 74 Caste dictated almost every aspect of Hindu religious and social life, with each group occupying a specific place in this complex hierarchy. Castes almost always lived

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70 Ibid., 116.
73 Ibid. This meeting is here incorrectly called a General Chapter. It was a General Congregation, a meeting held between General Chapters.
in segregated colonies, and even the water wells were not shared.\textsuperscript{75} Sadly, for the converts to Christianity the Caste system was so entrenched that it could not be eliminated. To obviate this, Helene established separate Novitiates for the women in their respective castes.\textsuperscript{76} A novitiate for the Untouchables was established in Ootacamund, and one for the Burmese women in Mandalay.\textsuperscript{77}

The Oblates received formation in their own countries with regard to the aim of the Institute and Christian spirituality and made annual private vows. Helene wrote: “They go, two by two, into the outlying districts to ‘preach’ both by word and example.”\textsuperscript{78} They were to be located near a convent of the Sisters, “returning to the convent once a month for a day of recollection and yearly for a retreat...and the superior of the convent would visit them at least once a month.”\textsuperscript{79}

The majority of the Oblates came from the orphanages of the Institute, were students of the Sisters’ schools; others were those who had been impressed by the life and ministry of the Sisters.\textsuperscript{80} The number of Oblates continued to grow, spreading to other countries as well.\textsuperscript{81} In 1922 the Superior General, Marie de Saint Michel, wrote to \textit{Propaganda} regarding their role:

\begin{quote}
The institute at present counts among its members more than one hundred Chinese, twenty Indians and as many Japanese...We need therefore, to firstly assure for the vocations of the country the serious religious formation and the stable and lasting conditions which are indispensable for fruitful action; secondly, send religious to the very centre of work, as pioneers of truth in places where it is difficult for Europeans to establish themselves.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

The work of these local Oblates opened many doors for the foreign Sisters. They had prepared the groundwork for Sisters of other nationalities to be accepted amongst the indigenous peoples: “European Sisters was taken further afield, and a more abundant harvest assured.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{76} Cf. Nboma and Bazin, \textit{Les Oblates}, 6.
\textsuperscript{77} Cf. Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{78} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Oblates of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary}, 9.
\textsuperscript{79} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Our Family History}, Part II, 28.
\textsuperscript{80} Nboma and Bazin, \textit{Les Oblates}, 2.
\textsuperscript{81} For instance, to Sri Lanka, Japan and Madagascar. Cf. FMM Booklet, 10, 11.
\textsuperscript{82} Marie de St Michel, in \textit{For the Mission and its Risks}, 116, 117.
\textsuperscript{83} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Oblates of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary}, 12.
While the Oblates were very successful in their ministries, the Sisters had been asking for the full integration of the Oblates into the Institute as they were upset at their ‘inferior’ position. The Oblates were eventually welcomed as full members of the Institute in 1960. The Superior General at the time wrote: “Yes, 10,240, ‘all Sisters’, in the joy of a unity that was formerly desired by Mother Mary of the Passion…” In May 1961 Bishop Sigismondi, Secretary of Propaganda wrote: "It is not easy to find an Institute as universal as yours, from the point of view of different races and peoples..." At this stage in the development of the Institute, though, it was still very Eurocentric; that is, the manner of life and the style of the habit all reflected European customs.

Assisting the Society of St Peter the Apostle

The concern for the formation of local vocations led Helene to accept a request from Joanne Bigard in 1904 to take over the responsibility for the Society of St Peter the Apostle. Madame Bigard’s mother, Stephanie Cottin-Bigard, had set up the Society to raise funds for the formation of indigenous clergy, initially in Japan:

At the end of 1901 it was found that in twelve years the Society of St Peter the Apostle had founded forty-five perpetual burses in the native seminaries and paid annually all the expenses for the education of fourteen native seminarians. (sic)

Madame Bigard was unable to continue due to ill health and her daughter Joanne assumed the work. When asked by Joanne to take over the Society, Helene agreed wholeheartedly as she saw the development of local clergy as a vital ministry. The Sisters continued this initiative until it was taken over by the Holy See in 1922. Years later in his Apostolic Letter of 1965 Pope Paul VI highly praised the two Bigard women, Helene, and the Institute for

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84 Marie de Sainte Agnes, in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary For the Mission and its Risks, 187.
85 Cited in For the Mission and its Risks, 188.
86 Cf. Colonialism in Parts of China for more on the questions of the Habit.
87 Goyau, Valiant Women, 291. “The Society trains young men and women in their own country and culture to serve their people as religious sisters, brothers, or priests. Also assisted in their formation and training are those catechists who have been chosen to be the teachers and formators of the catechists in their country.” http://www.catholicmission.org.au/about-us/history/saint-peter- apostle (accessed 2 April, 2015).
their initiative on behalf of the education of local clergy. He repeated this commendation again in a Homily on 9 September, 1965.\textsuperscript{89}

**Missionary Endeavours**

A new impetus for missionary activity throughout the Church was greatly encouraged by Pope Leo XIII. In his 1880 Encyclical he urged a renewed missionary effort by all Catholics.\textsuperscript{90} The historian Latourette wrote the following, which captured Helene’s expansive understanding of mission as the responsibility of every Christian:

No longer was the extension of the faith among non-Christians the enterprise of a few specialists, but more and more it engaged the active attention of the great body of practising Roman Catholics, those who took their faith seriously.\textsuperscript{91}

However, Catholics were strongly encouraged by Pope Leo XIII to support missionaries both spiritually and financially only: “These two offices which consist in giving and in praying are both very useful in extending wider the borders of the Kingdom of heaven…”\textsuperscript{92} Missionaries kept in touch with their home communities and benefactors through their magazines and other literature. The content of these publications was largely about the works of the missionaries, including photographs and reports of how the donations received were being spent. The role of the laity was still considered ‘secondary’ to that of the ‘professional’ priests and religious. Later popes would encourage direct lay involvement as missionaries themselves.\textsuperscript{93}

In 1887 Helene herself began a newsletter calling it the *Annals*.\textsuperscript{94} It was intended to keep the Congregation’s benefactors informed of the Sisters’ works, and to inspire missionary zeal in its readers. This publication recounted the various activities of the Sisters and their struggles, especially in remote and unfamiliar places. Upon reading issues of the *Annals*, the Minister


\textsuperscript{92} Leo XIII, *Sancta-Dei-Civitas*, #2.


\textsuperscript{94} Later editions of this publication in English were titled: *Far Away Lands*. 
General of the Franciscan Friars wrote: “I read them quickly, as soon as they arrived, and I was almost moved to tears. Oh! May God bless the Order and me because of the merits of these dear daughters, our Sisters!”

St Therese of Lisieux once said that, upon reading a copy of the Annals on her way to Rome in 1887, she was very tempted to join the Institute as the stories aroused a strong desire in her to be a missionary. Her sister who was travelling with her convinced her to maintain her decision to enter the Carmelites. By 1913 the Annals was being published in six languages: French, Italian, English, German, Dutch and Spanish.

Europe as Mission Territory

Helene’s understanding of mission was evolving through her encounters during her travels throughout Europe. These experiences over the years led her to see that, whilst the aim of going to places where Christ was not known was paramount, the needs of the peoples of Europe could not be neglected. One could not see a need and do nothing about it. Seeing the destitution of many people in the large cities in Europe, Helene discovered a new mission field. She set about doing what she could to address the plight of the needy, beginning with the establishment of a convent in a very poor area of Paris. The people there were described by a priest as “the worst savages of all, civilised savages.” Another house was set up in Antwerp, Belgium, among “15,000 down-and-outs.” In Austria, also, after seeing how the Sisters cared for some elderly men in the township, the mayor asked Helene to carry out a study of the city’s hospitals: “This she did and submitted the report of her investigations.”

Mission was also to the ‘de-christianised’ nations of Europe as Helene deemed them. In a letter to the Sisters, Helene wrote:

Pray for these nations so profoundly humiliated by Protestants, Jews and freemasons. They have been divided and isolated, so that they have become incapable even of safeguarding the faith of their own members.

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95 Quoted by Mother Marie Johanne d’Arc in Life of Very Reverend Mother Mary of the Passion. Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. (Grottaferratta, Italy: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1913), 105.
97 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 193. Copies can be found in the Archives in Rome.
98 De Maleissye, The Century of Mary of the Passion, 171.
99 Alini and Foujols, An Apostle Sent by God, 74.
100 De Maleissye, The Century of Mary of the Passion, 168, 169. A copy of this report had not been made.
101 Letter of 1 January, 1895 to all the Sisters, quoted in Mary of the Passion, 509.
One of these de-christianised nations was Portugal. From the sixth century Muslims dominated in Portugal. It was not until the thirteenth century that Christians overcame the Muslims. However, in 1834 over 300 monasteries and their communities were confiscated with the aim of reducing the Queen’s debts, but without success, and the country remained in turmoil.\textsuperscript{102} The Sisters went to Portugal in 1895 at the request of the Apostolic Nuncio, Bishop Jacobini. They took charge of a hostel for 500 working men and women financed by Count Burnay.\textsuperscript{103} Only six years later, in 1901, the Government forbade religious orders in the country. The Sisters in the Lisbon convent were ordered to leave within three hours. The other convents in Portugal were able to continue for a while longer, with the Sisters wearing lay clothing.\textsuperscript{104} Seven months later permission was given to re-open that convent. Yet an anti-religious revolution erupted in 1910 and all the Sisters at that time were expelled. In 1940, the government signed a concordat with the Church, and the Sisters returned.\textsuperscript{105}

Anti-clerical persecutions by the French government continued to affect religious Orders. Members of religious Congregations were forbidden to engage in teaching.\textsuperscript{106} This affected the Franciscan Friars who were expelled from France. Helene had already had prepared a place for them, anticipating the expulsion. The Sisters in Fribourg, Switzerland, gave their convent to the Friars and moved to another place.\textsuperscript{107} The Sisters were subsequently invited to Holland where they were received very warmly. At this, Helene expressed surprise: “God’s ways are really incomprehensible! While the eldest daughter of the Church [France] is giving us so much sorrow, a Protestant nation gives us a lovely welcome!”\textsuperscript{108}

In 1903 Helene again decried the lack of charity and truth in “the whole world, even the catholic world, so far removed from truth and charity. Lies and unneighbourly deeds are the weapons of the majority, even of the Catholics; one sees it even in Holy Orders and among religious.”\textsuperscript{109} Helene continued:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[103] Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 578.
\item[104] Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 450-452.
\item[107] Cf. \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 490.
\item[108] In Letter of 26 October, 1903, quoted in \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 529. The ‘eldest daughter’ is France.
\item[109] Letter of 27 May, 1903, in \textit{The Century of Mary of the Passion}, 159.
\end{footnotes}
I have seen that if all those consecrated to God kept clear of partisan views, they would escape the revolutions. Priests and religious, both men and women, should adopt universal charity and consequently belong to no party. I beg the Holy Spirit urgently that this charity, which is an image of God’s own, be the seal of the Missionaries of the Immaculate Virgin. We must give no outward support to any party, so that we may belong to all creatures.\textsuperscript{110}

Helene wrote: “God’s will for the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate: it is to support God’s mercy against His justice, and our weapons are truth and charity.”\textsuperscript{111} Helene lamented the lack of truth within the Church as well as in society: “Because of this sad end of the century, truth is imprisoned, captive, chained, all but obscured everywhere and in everything, charity must share the same fate.”\textsuperscript{112} A year before her death in 1904 she penned: “Lies and unneighbourly deeds are the weapons of the majority, even of Catholics; one sees it even in Holy Orders and among religious... we are parched through the lack of truth, we are wounded by the lack of charity.”\textsuperscript{113} In this Helene anticipated the direction that a later Pope would take. A sentiment similar to hers would be expressed later by Pope Pius XII in 1957 when he issued an encyclical on Catholic Missions: “Let them direct this zeal toward those regions of Europe in which the Christian religion has been cast off.”\textsuperscript{114}

**Helene’s Support for Workers**

While living in Europe, Helene recognised a new missionary challenge for herself and her Sisters. Helene had seen the destitution of so many people in India, and now saw it also in Europe itself. With new insight into the changing world, Helene observed: “We do not need an old program. It would never do now. The world has changed too much because of modern inventions.”\textsuperscript{115} New needs had arisen with the industrial revolution, particularly with the construction of factories necessitating the relocation sometimes of entire families from the countryside into new-found cities seeking employment. This brought with it problems of accommodation and labour conditions which affected the livelihood of the workers. Researcher Richard Eckersley wrote of the effects of the Industrial Revolution in England were the same for most countries affected:

\textsuperscript{110} In a letter of 18 April 1902, in *The Century of Mary of the Passion*, 166.

\textsuperscript{111} Helene de Chappotin, in *The Spirit of the Institute*, 20.

\textsuperscript{112} Helene de Chappotin, in *The Century of Mary of the Passion*, 159.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} Pius XII, *Fidei Donum* #5, \url{http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_xii_enc_21041957_fidei-donum_en.htm} (accessed 24 September, 2007).

\textsuperscript{115} Alini and Foujols, *An Apostle Sent by God*, 151.
A study of England during the Industrial Revolution demonstrates that economic
growth, far from leading inevitably to development, can result in the ‘four Ds’ of
disruption, deprivation, disease and death, because of its impact on social and
political stability and order.\textsuperscript{116}

Helene was deeply concerned for them and their families. Speaking of the innovations in
machinery and the impact this had on the ordinary worker, Helene wrote: “The workman now
receives hardly anything from the product of his work; he no longer possesses any real
property…as a factory ‘hand’, he goes in and comes out empty-handed.”\textsuperscript{117} Helene saw the
danger in this process, saying:

If no one comes to their aid…what will this proletarian army do? Their cries are
raising echoes all over the world. They will rise up like a new race. Whatever
happens, the people will have their way, either through peaceful evolution, if the
Church seizes its opportunity to lead them, or by revolution if the people act on
their own.\textsuperscript{118}

The Sisters came to realise the changing attitudes of peoples in many nations. In 1902 Helene
commented to one of the Sisters:

Someone said to me yesterday: ‘The future lies with the common people.’ I
believe that this is quite true...In 1793, the educated middle classes revolted
against the nobility and the clergy. Is it not now the turn of the educated populace
to revolt against the nobility, the clergy and the middle classes, especially against
those with money?\textsuperscript{119}

Helene’s response to the poverty of peoples included struggling against the causes of such
depprivation and striving for justice for all, especially for the worker. She wrote: “Give the
people work under all its forms and urge people to participate in this apostolate…”\textsuperscript{120} In this
way, Helene encouraged the laity to take up their part in the apostolate of promoting the
dignity of work. In saying this, Helene seemed to have gone beyond the Encyclical of Leo

\textsuperscript{116} Richard Eckersley, \textit{Well & Good. Morality, Meaning and Happiness}. (Melbourne, Australia: Text

\textsuperscript{117} Helene de Chappotin, letter of 18 May, 1902, in \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 514.

\textsuperscript{118} Helene de Chappotin, “Report on the situation in France” in \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 516.

\textsuperscript{119} Helene de Chappotin, 18 May, 1902, quoted in \textit{Mary of the Passion}, 514.

\textsuperscript{120} Helene de Chappotin, in a letter to E. Pacelli, lawyer, 27 December, 1903, quoted in \textit{An Apostle Sent by
God}, 156.

Helene saw the deception of the use the Scriptures by some people to justify their wealth. When giving a talk on ‘poverty’ she told the Sisters: “In our century it is customary to say: ‘Here is prosperity and success, so God is here!’ Those who say so have never read the Gospels!” She insisted that in all the works of the Institute the Sisters pay just wages to their employees…

…so that the worker may benefit from the increase of capital brought about by his/her efforts… and no longer be an isolated individual at the mercy of those who, possessing the power of wealth, can impose their own conditions...

Her efforts to counter injustice were not limited to her own Institute, but stretched beyond the confines of Church and State. This is seen in her meetings with several employers in the business world, such as Leon Harmel, Georges Decurtins and M. Bietry.

A Frenchman, a devout Catholic and owner of a large milling business, Leon Harmel (1829–1915) founded the ‘Mutual Aid Society’ for his workers. Today this would be similar to a cooperative. He also organised co-operative stores so that workers were not overcharged, dispensaries for medical consultations, orphanages and a firemen’s company. Duncan expanded on the benefits for the workers in Harmel’s establishment: “His factory had a plant council, a savings bank, a co-operative society, medical aid, and wages supplements for large families.” Harmel also wrote a ‘Manual for a Christian Corporation’, and a ‘Catechism for

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122 Pope John Paul II Encyclical, *Laborum Exercens* (on Human Work) w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/.../hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html (accessed 9 September, 2017). The pope wrote of situations in the twentieth century which affect workers, “…the widespread introduction of automation into many spheres of production, the increase in the cost of energy and raw materials, the growing realization that the heritage of nature is limited and that it is being intolerably polluted, and the emergence on the political scene of peoples who, after centuries of subjection, are demanding their rightful place among the nations and in international decision-making.” #1.
123 Talk given in December, 1882, cited in *Mary of the Passion*, 471.
124 Ibid., 515.
126 Duncan, *The Church’s Social Teaching*, 53.
the Employer’, and in 1893 inaugurated the first Congress of Christian Workers at Reims. In this way he retained the Christian values within his workplace, and encouraged them in his employees.

As a faithful Catholic dedicated to the papacy, Harmel organised pilgrimages to Rome with some of his workers and stayed with Helene and the Sisters. Helene kept in touch with Harmel, supporting him in his efforts to secure just wages and safe working conditions, not only for his own employees, but for all workers. Dorothy Day spoke of Harmel’s influence in his own time:

(He) was the owner of spinning mills where 1,200 workers spun, dyed and wound the wool in Val des Bois, France. The work he did for his 1,200 workers in 1870 resulted in social legislation that benefitted millions of workers in France now. What other employers refused to do voluntarily, the state forced them to do. He saw the need of industrial organization, and his workers were formed into syndicates, as the unions were called there.

Helene arranged for some of the Sisters to be trained in Harmel’s factory, specialising in carpet-making.

Georges Decurtins, with whom Helene corresponded on a number of occasions, was a member of the Swiss Parliament. He was aware of Helene’s deep concern for the worker, and wrote of her: “She fully understood the terrible importance of the social question; what others come to recognise after lengthy studies, much reading, and a lifetime’s patient observation, she had understood through the interior spirit of her soul.”

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128 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, An Apostle Sent by God, 152. For more on Harmel, see Joan L. Coffey, Léon Harmel, Entrepreneur as Catholic Social Reformer. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.)
130 Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 207.
131 Cf. Leo Schelbert, Historical Dictionary of Switzerland, 73.
132 Helene de Chappotin, in Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 232. Decurtins also became the main formulator and protector of catholic social doctrine in Switzerland. cf. Leo Schelbert, Historical Dictionary of Switzerland. (Scarecrow Press: Maryland, USA, 2007), 73.
In 1897 Decurtins “organised the first and only international congress for the protection of workers attended by Christians and Marxists.”\(^{133}\) In one of her letters to Decurtins, Helene expressed her desire that, through their cooperation on behalf of workers, the women would be able to obtain the improvement for themselves in their own condition.\(^{134}\) On 22 October, 1904, Helene wrote to Decurtins following a Congress held in Amsterdam. At that meeting an International Socialist party was formed which would be without any political affiliation. Helene encouraged Decurtins to work for a similar party for Catholics.\(^{135}\)

Not long after Helene’s death in 1904, Decurtins acknowledged her foresightedness in desiring an alliance of Catholic nations:

One can never say enough about the greatness of her mind and the sureness of her views, so profound and so vast. She has left us two very modern thoughts: the idea of the union of the Latin nations and the conviction about their vitality. Every day, every new event among the Latin peoples demonstrates how right she was when she called for this union.\(^{136}\)

In 1902 a Frenchman M. Bietry founded the Blacklegs for “a fusion of classes and extension of property for all.”\(^{137}\) Helene encouraged him since it fitted well with her aim of justice and dignity for women, particularly the young ones. Her concern for workers led her to write “After having guided and prepared them in our schools, we abandon them at the very moment when they begin to live their own lives and to make their own way…”\(^{138}\)

Besides various men struggling for the rights of workers, a laywoman, Marie-Louise Rochebillard [1960-1936] was striving wholeheartedly for women workers. She was born in Lyons, France, and was considered the pioneer of catholic social action for women’s working conditions.\(^{139}\) In one of Helene’s letters to M. Bietry she speaks of Mlle Rochebillard, and so was aware of her work. Mlle Rochebillard strove to improve the inhumane conditions of the

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\(^{133}\) Schelbert, *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*, 73.

\(^{134}\) Letter to Georges Decurtins, 12 March, 1904, cited in *An Apostle Sent by God*, 141.


\(^{138}\) Helene de Chapotin, in *Mary of the Passion*, 518.

working class in France, particularly that of women. She founded a Union towards that end. One account related: “At the initiative of Madame Lorin, it (the Union) was created with the explicit purpose of assisting the development of professional unions for women.” Helene would have found a kindred spirit in Madame Lorin.

Leo XIII and Support for Workers

Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical in 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, was ground-breaking for workers:

*Rerum Novarum* marked a decisive moment in the history of the Catholic Church and later social movements worldwide. It gave the highest official authorisation to Catholic social activism and laid the basis for Catholic support for trade unionism, and political and social reforms.

Supporting workers and their inalienable rights to a decent living wage, this landmark document “…brought the Catholic Church into a new and more positive engagement with the social problems arising from the industrial revolution, and galvanised the energies of many Catholics to join the struggle for social justice and workers’ rights.” Helene was given a copy of this document, but no record is found of her reaction to it. Her support and encouragement for workers’ rights would have been confirmed and reinforced by the pope’s statement. The Pope declared:

The foremost duty…of the rulers of the State should be to make sure that the laws and institutions, the general character and administration of the commonwealth, shall be such as of themselves to realize public well-being and private prosperity…it lies in the power of a ruler to benefit every class in the State.

Helene was deeply convinced that “…between evangelisation and human promotion…there are profound links…for the person who is to be evangelised is not an abstract being but is

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140 Cf. Ibid.
143 Bruce Duncan, *The Church’s Social Teaching*, 210.
subject to social and economic questions."\(^{146}\) When criticised by some Church members about
the Sisters’ interest in the problems of work and workers, Helene replied: “Give the job first
and the spiritual will follow afterwards of its own accord.”\(^{147}\)

**Concern for Catholic Nations**

Helene encouraged others within Europe to work for the common good. She saw that this
could be achieved through a union of the Catholic nations of Europe. She encouraged Catholic
leaders in Europe to form an alliance of Catholic nations as a means of safeguarding the faith
which she saw as seriously threatened: “If good people do not bring about this union of the
Catholic nations, it will come about all the same, but it will be for the worse and according to
the designs of the sects.”\(^{148}\) These ‘sects’ were the so-called enemies of Catholicism written
about in various encyclicals of the popes: the Jews, Protestants and Masons.\(^{149}\) Writing a
report on the Catholic nations, with an emphasis on France, Helene detailed their troubles and
hopes.\(^{150}\) However, the depth of Helene’s insights was not generally accepted and thus not
acted upon.

**Cooperation with the Laity**

The understanding of the role of every Christian as a missionary in her/his own situation was
not given strong emphasis by the Catholic Church until Pope Pius X, in his encyclical of
1905: “Here We wish to recall those numerous works of zeal for the good of the Church,
society, and individuals under the general name of ‘Catholic Action,’ which by the grace of
God flourish throughout the world as well as in Our Italy.”\(^{151}\) This document encouraged lay
Catholics to become actively involved in society and influence it for the common good. Many
significant endeavours for lay action in the Church were already in existence; for instance,
the St Vincent de Paul Society, which Frederic Ozanam began in 1833.152 Ozanam was a French student who worked tirelessly to assist the poor in Paris. His movement spread rapidly throughout France, and then overseas. The Society remains very strong in many countries; for instance, in Australia a number of Sisters are participants in their works following their Foundress’ desire to minister to the poorest.153

Another popular lay group is *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (JOC), in English, the Young Christian Workers (YCW),154 a movement which began in 1912 under the impetus of Joseph, later Cardinal Cardijn (13 November 1882- 24 July 1967).155 Cardijn’s vision was wide-reaching, inspiring many young Catholics and giving them a means of expressing their faith and channelling their passion for justice. The Sisters used his method of see-judge-act in their schools as a system of gospel study in the Young Christian Students Association.156

Upon the death of the Superior General of the Sisters, Mother St Michel, in 1931, Cardijn wrote that he “...owed a lot to her for the founding of the JOC.”157 A number of Sisters who had been members of this movement were inspired to join the Institute through their involvement with the YCW. The YCW method of reflection is widely used today at meetings (eg., General Chapters, discernment programs) by the Sisters.158

The influence of the YCW in the United States of America was extensive. Following the stress on Catholic Action in various papal encyclicals, the bishops announced a project called “Papal Volunteers for Latin America.”159 This proved to be a success, yet it remained largely controlled by the bishops. Later, the involvement of missionary orders led to better formation for the lay volunteers.160

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156 Cf. for instance, Scanlon, *The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 266.
157 Quoted in *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 127.
160 Ibid., 194.
The Superior General Mother Michel [1920-1931] gave a great deal of support for the Secular Franciscan Institute, ‘The Kingship of Christ’ which Fr Gemelli, a Franciscan Friar, helped to establish with the Venerable Armida Barelli. He expressed his deep gratitude to Mother Michel for her assistance. As with the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Secular Franciscan Order provides the laity with avenues for direct involvement in the mission of the Church. A number of Sisters have been, and still remain Spiritual Assistants to the various groups. The Sisters carry on this mission in accordance with their Foundress’ wish to assist others spiritually as well as physically.

Pius XII promoted the World Congresses of the Lay Apostolate, the first in 1951 and the second in 1957. Addressing the crowd during the Second World Congress, the Pope expressed the aim of the first gathering:

"It prompted Catholics to consider not only their duties toward themselves, but also their duties toward the Church, civil society, and all humankind. It forcefully emphasized the importance of personal participation by the laity in the organization and successful execution of many projects in the religious, social, and cultural fields."

In his address at the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate on 5 October, 1957, Pius XII reiterated his words at the First World Congress: “It is up to you to make your contribution with all your strength.” The Sisters aided the Lay Apostolate by employing women who had been trained by them in their workrooms to train others in their turn. This was particularly helpful in the workrooms which the Sisters established to work “against the misery and exploitation of the lower-class woman…” The women made handiworks for sale, and they themselves managed most of the business side of the things. In France, for instance, after the Franciscan Friars had been expelled from the country in 1903, Helene set up workshops in the Friars’ old premises, naming the venture: “The Society of the Arts and Handicrafts of Women.” The Sisters organised the enterprise dressed in lay clothes due to the anti-

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161 For the Mission and Its Risks, 127.
163 Ibid.
164 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and Its Risks, 23.
165 Cf. Chapter Five for more details on the expulsion in Europe as Mission Territory.
166 Cf. Alini, and Foujols, FMM, An Apostle Sent by God, 139.
Catholic atmosphere in France. This workroom employed “more than 500 working women, all earning adequate salaries, thanks to the export to America of their finest products.”

Helene opened a shop in Paris to sell the handiworks of women from other workrooms in other continents. In fact, the Sisters were sent “peddling the goods across Europe…” This was part of the Foundress’ endeavours to assist women, particularly the poor. Helene also saw these workrooms as a means of preparing women for their lives as mothers in the family and educators of their children.

In their workrooms for women in the various countries, Helene encouraged the use of the local symbols and designs in the embroidery and art works which reflected the culture of the peoples. Chinese patterns were reproduced, and adaptations of Hindu art was used in designing Church vestments.

Helene taught the Sisters to seek, not a utilitarian output, but rather the turning to good account of all that was part of the local culture, not only in the eyes of Europeans who, perhaps did not understand it, but in the eyes of the people themselves, so that they could become aware of its riches, and above all, find in a work which was interesting and formative a means of moral balance and personal dignity, rooted in their own traditions.

The Sisters brought the various handiworks of the women to Europe where there was a lucrative market for them, generating a good income for the women. This was also a practice within other Congregations, as a means of income and/or training of women. For instance, the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, founded in Australia in 1874 as a contemplative Congregation, sold handiworks to maintain themselves.
Some Further Developments of Mission Work

Helene accepted invitations for foundations from governments as well as Catholic officials, provided the reason for the foundation was “obtaining the reign of God on the earth, the renewal of the evangelical and Christian spirit.” For example, in response to a call from the British administrator in Colombo, Ceylon, Helene sent Sisters to take charge of a hospital there. Prisoners were made to work in this hospital, which gave the Sisters another apostolate with these men. The Sisters found themselves in a similar situation in a leprosarium in Madagascar. Prisoners were made to nurse the lepers as part of their sentence. The Sisters followed the prisoners progress once they had been released to assist in their re-integration into the community. Helene also accepted a request from the Belgian government to manage a hospital in Boma, Congo, and another from the Portuguese government to serve in a hospital in Beira, Mozambique.

While the first Sisters were mostly Europeans, the first African woman to join the Sisters was Sellouha, a Sudanese and a Muslim. She had been kidnapped and made a slave but was freed following the French ban on slavery. A French officer hired Sellouha as a maid, and she lived with him and his family until he was transferred to another country. Sellouha was subsequently offered accommodation with the Sisters in Rome. After some time, she became a Catholic and subsequently decided to commit herself to God by joining the Sisters in 1896.

By 1900 Helene judged that the task of founding convents in Europe for recruiting Sisters was finished, and she concentrated more on sending the Sisters overseas.

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175 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 69.
176 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, An Apostle Sent by God, 146.
177 Cf. Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 While the source calls Sellouha ‘Sudanese’; that French protectorate was later named Mali.
182 Ibid., 72.
Sending the Sisters Overseas

As soon as Sisters had been prepared both spiritually and academically they were also sent to places outside Europe, for instance, to Carthage in 1885 and in 1886 to Ceylon and China. Upon arriving in mission areas, various services were set up, not only to care for the poor, but also to train the people professionally, particularly the women, to better themselves and to continue these same services.

While Helene repeatedly called for unity amongst the Sisters, at the same time she encouraged unity in all matters: “We have grown incredibly in seven years, and I can see that, even far from me, our family spirit of charity, this precious treasure, is ours more than ever. Let us ask that we never let it be taken away from us.”

As the number of Sisters grew rapidly, by 1890 they were sent to various other mission territories, thus expanding the Institute on a very wide geographic scale. In the one year, 1900, eleven foundations were made: in Lyon, France, Chatham in England, two in Hungary, Madagascar, and further foundations in the Belgian Congo, Vienna, Italy and Ceylon. In 1901 there were two foundations and in 1902 another seven. By 1896 there were 1,156 Sisters, and within the next eight years the number had almost doubled to 2,069 at the time of Helene’s death in 1904.

Various factors which favoured the rapid development of the Institute include the following:

The deep faith and strong personality of the Foundress Helene and the first Sisters’ missionary experience
The response to the needs of anyone, regardless of religion
The solid formation given to the Sisters
The internationality of the Institute
Helene’s intense spiritual life which she shared with the others.

Helene responded wherever possible to a need, seeing this as an opportunity to spread the love of God to everyone.

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183 Helene de Chappotin, letter of 22 November, 1903, in For the Mission and Its Risks, 42.
Influence of Colonialism on Mission

Whilst the missionaries went to remote places to spread the Good News, they frequently found themselves the unwitting agents of European colonising powers. One author wrote of the precarious position of the early missionaries in the Americas: “The missionaries taught them the truths of Christianity and prepared them for baptism, but at the same time the colonists forced them to work for their benefit and used violence if they judged it necessary.”187 Writing in the twentieth century, the missiologists Bevans and Schroeder explained the link which developed between some colonisers and missionaries stating: “Whatever their explicit intentions, missionaries became agents of the Western powers as the three ‘Cs’ of colonialism became Christianity, commerce and civilization.”188 Helene was aware of this tendency, and while making the most of the advantages of the practical support that these governments offered, she also warned the Sisters against any political interference by European countries which could hinder the work of the missions.189 This warning was in line with later writings of the Popes, for instance, Paul VI:

Besides erecting sacred edifices, her missionaries have also promoted construction of hospitals, sanitariums, schools and universities. By teaching the native population how to take full advantage of natural resources, the missionaries often protected them from the greed of foreigners.190

Colonisation by the Western countries was aided by the invention of the steam engine in the mid eighteenth century. Along with the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869,191 these innovations allowed faster and safer travel from Europe to areas previously difficult to reach. Also, the advent of the telegraph in the nineteenth century permitted rapid communication never previously available. Africa and South America were fought over and divided up amongst a number of European countries at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), without

189 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 112.
consideration for the sovereignty of the peoples or taking into account the borders already
agreed upon between existing tribes. The nations of Asia were later targeted by colonisers,
particularly the ‘Spice Islands’, the Indonesian archipelago of the Molucca, which proved to
be very lucrative for many parts of Europe: “Until the 1700s, these rain-forested, luxuriant,
volcanic islands were the only or best sources of such spices as cloves, nutmeg, and mace.”

Colonialism in Parts of Africa

One of the Europeans who scrambled for control of a part of Africa at the end of the nineteenth
century was Belgium's King Leopold II. He set up his own private empire in the Congo which lasted from 1877 to 1908. This colonial outpost “was bigger than England, France, Germany, Spain and Italy combined.” It is said that he left “arguably the largest and most horrid legacy of all.” Author Adam Hochschild explained:

... what happened in the Congo could reasonably be called the most murderous part of the European Scramble for Africa...Within a decade of [Leopold's] head start in the Congo, similar forced labour systems for extracting rubber were in place in the French territories west and north of the Congo River, in Portuguese-ruled Angola, and in the nearby Cameroon under the Germans.

Word of the cruelties committed in the Belgian Congo reached England, and the British government launched an official investigation in 1900. Yet it was not until 1908 that the Belgian parliament, “yielding to international pressure...annexed the CFS (Congo Free State) as the Belgian Congo, effectively removing Leopold from power.”

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194 This was acknowledged “by the United States and the European powers...in 1885”, Cf. Matthew G. Stanard, Selling the Congo: a history of European pro-empire propaganda and the making of Belgian imperialism. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 7.
197 Hochschild, “The Butcher of Congo.”
Yet while many were condemning King Leopold's barbarity, “his accusers were committing much the same atrocities against Africans elsewhere on the continent.” It was not until 1949 that nations on the African continent began to succeed in their struggle for freedom from their colonial overlords.

Cardinal Lavigerie was a strong advocate against slavery which he saw in his diocese in Carthage, Tunisia. He eventually succeeded in obtaining some measure of addressing the issue: “An ‘Anti-slavery Act’...signed in Brussels in 1890, adopting Lavigerie’s suggestions and engaging the signatory governments to extirpate slavery from their colonies by all means in their power.”

When asked by Cardinal Goosens of Belgium to make a foundation in the Belgian Congo in 1896, Helene did not hesitate. Helene was supported financially in the foundation by Princess Clementine, the daughter of King Leopold. In order to further prepare the Sisters for this distant missionary service, Helene began a missionary school in 1896 and opened it to other missionaries leaving for the Congo. The Sisters were to work with the Scheut Fathers who had already been in the area for eight years. The Scheut Fathers were some of the missionaries who sent their members to this school before leaving for the Congo. The Sisters had heard of King Leopold’s “philanthropic dreams...to create an independent Congo State and play a personal part in the history of evangelizing the Congolese masses...” They also knew of Cardinal Lavigerie’s labours against the abuses of the King through their foundations in his mission territory. The first Sisters arrived in the Congo in 1896. Their ministry was working with the priests who had rescued boys from slave-traders. They were asked to care for the girls there.

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199 Hochschild, “The Butcher of Congo.”
200 Cf Bevans, Theology in Global Perspective, 296.
202 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mary of the Passion, 412.
205 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 1946 Year Book of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.
207 Cf. Ibid., 690.
208 Cf. Ibid., 691.
Helene wrote to the Director of the State Administration of the Congo in Brussels explaining her ideas for agricultural settlements in the missions. These would be large areas of land allocated by the State to the missionaries, and house an orphanage for boys run by the priests, another for girls managed by the Sisters, and adjoining the settlement, land for young married couples from the orphanages who “...should receive a small house and enough land to provide them with simple vegetables. They should not be given more, for this would make the Blacks we are trying to civilize too independent.”

This attitude of superiority reflected the unconscious understanding of Helene and the Sisters of the link between evangelisation and civilisation among many European missionaries. Yet this belief that Christianity, while offering the Gospel to others could also be a means of improving the peoples’ culture, was manipulated for commercial ends as well. As Hochschild stated:

A key argument that was often invoked as a justification for colonialism in Africa was that of the "civilizing influence" of the European culture. As elsewhere, this self-declared 'civilizing mission' went hand in hand with the goal of economic gain. Conversion to Catholicism, basic western-style education and improved health care were objectives in their own right, but at the same time helped to transform what was regarded as a "primitive society" into the Western model, in which workers who were disciplined and healthy, and who had learned to read and write could be more efficiently put to work.

However, Helene’s vision expanded when hearing word of the Sisters’ work in some countries. Responding to news she had just received from Zululand, Helene wrote of her admiration for the local people:

These poor deprived people...are far more fervent and more faithful than the whites...These simple, still uncivilized races are far more interesting than our European peoples, who are deceived and led astray by a wicked press.

The African author, Laurenti Magesa, reflecting on the early missionaries on the African continent, said:

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209 Helene de Chappotin in *Mary of the Passion*, 298.
211 Helene de Chappotin, letter of 9 April, 1903, quoted in *Mary of the Passion*, 497.
one must at the same time acknowledge that most of these mistakes were made in good faith. Since they were the children of their age and the product of their cultures much of their interpretation of the Gospel and many of their methods of communicating it reflect this… Despite the necessary adaptation of their missionary methods the Missionary Institutes made in Africa, the main paradigm underlying their thought and practice remained for a long time predominantly, if not exclusively, Eurocentric. They failed to take into account the importance of the respective cultural contexts and this oversight consequently prevented the faith from sending down deep roots into the total existence of the African people, who often felt alienated by the language and symbols of the Christian faith.  

This attitude pointed out by Magesa was also true of the Sisters in their approach to the peoples of Africa. However, other countries also suffered from European colonisers such as in Latin America. The rush for the gold and other valuables, using the indigenous peoples as slaves, led to the decimation of whole tribes. The desire for trade and dominance in parts of Asia also extended colonisation.

**Colonialism in Parts of China**

The Sisters were not always aware of their impact upon the peoples. Amongst one of the first countries to which the Sisters went was China, in 1886. The Sisters believed that the devil ruled in China, as seen in one of their letters: “Please pray for me my dear Alice, that I bring many souls to the Divine Shepherd in that distant land where Satan reigns as master.”

On the voyage to China and on the journey to the remote mission, the Sisters wore Chinese clothing. They were easily recognised and were frequently called ‘European devils.’ However, as soon as they arrived at their destination they donned the habit again. This was despite the advice of the envoy of the bishop who accompanied the Sisters, as one of the Sisters recounted in a letter: “He made an awful face when he saw our habit, telling me that

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216 Cf. Goyau, Valiant Women, 110.
the Chinese would not like it.” The reaction of this Sister demonstrated the importance of the design of the habit over any adaptation to the cultural sensitivities of the people. The history of the mission showed the attitude of superiority of some of the Sisters and of several early Catholic missionary priests and bishops over the Chinese.

Bishop Fogolla, an Italian Franciscan, is mentioned as having been particularly antagonistic towards many Chinese. Local Chinese priests frequently complained of being treated as inferiors. One Chinese priest went to Rome and asked of the pope: “Why are Chinese priests buried at the feet of the missionaries in the village cemetery?” Much later, in 1907, a French priest, Leon Joly, in his book on the history of mission in Asia, asked why, after hundreds of years of mission, have so few Chinese converted to Christianity? His opinion was that it was still seen as a foreign religion. This is evident in that the first Chinese bishops were not consecrated until 1926.

The Sisters worked in an orphanage which housed mainly girls because of the cultural preference for boys. Many of the girls had been abandoned or left on the doorsteps of the mission. The Sisters also cared for people with all types of diseases, and for the elderly. The Sisters went to a very remote area of Shanxi, Tai-Yuan-Fou, in 1899. There were difficulties at the beginning due to the Sisters’ lack of recognition of the work of the Chinese women already running the orphanage. Researcher Henrietta Harrison wrote:

The unhappiness in the orphanage…was exacerbated by the efforts of the newly arrived European nuns to position themselves as the religious superiors of the Chinese Virgins…The French mother superior placed a strong emphasis on obedience and humility and was in constant conflict with the Chinese virgins, who had previously run the institution.

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217 Marie Agnes de Saint Jean-Baptiste, Letter of 2 October, 1890, to Helene, in An Apostle Sent by God, 236.
218 Ibid.
220 Cf. The Missionary’s Curse, chapters 2, 3, 4.
223 Harrison, The Missionary’s Curse, 134. A similar report is recorded in Anthony E. Clark, Heaven in Conflict, 37.
There have been Chinese virgins in the Church since the seventeenth century, and by the nineteenth century they were giving Christian instruction to girls and women:

The care of patients and orphans had previously been assigned to the Chinese virgins, local Christian women who lived as dedicated, celibate catechists. These virgins had, before the appearance of the European women, fulfilled the principal role of female leadership at the Shanxi mission.\textsuperscript{224}

Added to the humiliation of these Chinese women being displaced by the European Sisters, there were also cultural differences over the attire of the girls in the orphanage. They were required by the Sisters to wear skirts over their trousers “to comply with European standards of modesty…”\textsuperscript{225}

Another researcher into the Franciscans in China during this period is Andrew Clark. In his book he explained another cause of the conflict between the Sisters and the Chinese virgins – the different concepts of hygiene. The Chinese women who had been in charge of the orphanage at the time of the Sisters’ arrival,

\text{…cared for eight hundred orphans, and on average twelve or fifteen new children, almost all of them girls, were left at the orphanage each day…the children, hardly clad, filthy, and covered in vermin…Many times…I have chastened the Virgins responsible for watching over them, trying to make them understand that we should take care of these children.}\textsuperscript{226}

A major contributing factor to the above conflict was the lack of water in the area.\textsuperscript{227} There were frequent droughts and subsequent famines due to the lack of rain. One of the Sisters, Marie Hermine de Jesus, recounted this in her letter of 25 June, 1900:

\text{Drought continues to torment China – from all sides more alarming news…many have already died of starvation…every day unfortunate women covered in rags come and kneel at our feet, begging us to give them clothes and food for themselves and their children. With a heavy heart and tears in my eyes, I can only distribute very little. Mission resources are so few, and mothers so many}\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{224} Clark, \textit{Heaven in Conflict}. 92.
\textsuperscript{225} Harrison, \textit{The Missionary’s Curse}, 135.
\textsuperscript{226} Clark, \textit{Heaven in Conflict}. 92.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 97. Historical records between 1876 and 1879 show “that the famine that afflicted China’s five northern provinces claimed more than nine and a half million lives.” Ibid., 73.
Another group of Sisters went to different part of China and wrote of their very good relationships with the Chinese virgins. In one instance, the Sisters were able to learn to respect the ways of the Chinese through their contact with these local women. In one of her many letters to the Foundress after arriving in China, Marie Agnes de Saint Jean-Baptiste wrote of the reception by the women: “These virgins showered us with respect, devotion, attention. They gave us their beds, their room, and lavished attention on us.”229 In another letter: “They found we were not dressed well enough, so they quickly sent someone to buy six lined jackets…to wear on top of our own. The Tertiaries gave us theirs to wear while they were washing ours.”230 Later, five of these Chinese virgins asked to join the Institute.231

Serious tensions erupted between China and the European countries which had invaded China and taken over parts of Shanghai.232 This was seen as “unbridled foreign aggression.”233 There was a growing fear by the Chinese that they would be reduced to servants of the western powers.234 One of the causes of the Boxer Uprising was an attempt by some Chinese to drive all foreigners out of China.235

By the end of the 19th century, the Western powers and Japan had forced China’s ruling Qing dynasty to accept wide foreign control over the country’s economic affairs. In the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60), popular rebellions and the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), China had fought to resist the foreigners, but it lacked a modernized military and suffered millions of casualties.236

According to historian Diana Preston,

The Western powers saw China as primitive and ripe for exploitation - in many respects the last area of the world where territorial gains could be made as the days of rapidly expanding Empires were over. For the Americans, late to the

229 M Agnes de Saint Jean-Baptise, FMM, to Helene de Chappotin, 6 November 1890, in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, An Apostle Sent by God, 238. M Agnes wrote frequently to Helene, recounting her six-month journey from France to the mission in China.
230 Letter of 7 November 1890, in An Apostle Sent by God, 240.
231 Cf. Launay, Helene de Chappotin, 193.
scramble for an empire, China offered a chance to make up for missed opportunities and create a new market for its goods. At no point did the Western powers see China as an equal despite the fact that Chinese civilisation pre-dated their own.237

The Sisters in Tai-Yuan-Fou, Shanxi, were caught up in the anti-Western, and anti-Christian reaction, and seven of them were beheaded only fourteen months after their arrival there. They were three French Sisters, two Italian, a Belgian and a Dutch Sister, between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-four.238 One author reported: “The battle continued for three months in Shanxi, claiming more than four thousand Catholics, and in the Tayuan diocese alone more than three thousand Chinese Catholics attached to the Franciscan mission were killed.”239

Helene was notified of the martyrdom of the Sisters by telegram, and was at that time unaware of the total number of deaths. Helene wrote to the Sisters informing them of the circumstances of the deaths:

We are, for St Francis, a souvenir of the century of the Immaculate Conception. In its last year, which is also the Holy Year, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary has completed the gift by giving to the Seraphic (Franciscan) Family seven martyrs, gathered from among its white Missionaries. So I can say with St Francis: ‘Now I have seven true Franciscan Missionaries of Mary…”240

A later report about the massacre stated that there were 562 children under the age of ten among the 1,820 martyred in the province of Shanxi alone during this period.241 During the Uprising over one thousand girls from the orphanage were kidnapped and sold. When peace returned to Shanxi, the Franciscan priests were able to obtain the recovery of some of the girls. Nearly all of them were returned to the care of another group of FMM Sisters who had

237 Preston, “The Boxer Rebellion”.
239 Clark, Heaven in Conflict, 122.
240 Helene de Chappotin, The General Letter of 29 September, 1900, to all the Sisters, in A Mother’s Journal to Her Daughters, Years 1900-1901. (Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Unpublished booklet), 33. The seven Sisters were among the 120 canonised on 1 October, 2000. (cf. FMM Information Service ‘Special Canonisation’, V/39 October-November 2000, 14).
arrived in June 1904. Recognition was given to all the Christian martyrs of the Boxer Uprising through their canonisation in 2000.

Most of the foreign Sisters were expelled from China much later under Mao Zedong [1893-1976] in 1953. Many of the local Sisters were imprisoned or fled to the mountains. When China reopened its doors in 1969, the Sisters were able to re-establish contact with the local Sisters who had survived, and now their numbers have increased substantially.

**The Closing Years of the Foundress’ Life**

As the numbers of women joining the Institute and the requests for foundations increased, Helene shared her concerns for the new Institute with the Sisters:

> The development of the Institute is a great worry for me. However, I would not put a check on the divine impulse. May God fulfil in all things His most Holy Will. As for us, let us promote it in all things so far as He grants us to do so.

Yet the path of life for Helene had been far from easy. Reflecting upon her many struggles in India and in Rome establishing the Institute, Helene wrote:

> It is not easy to imagine what I was suffering in Rome...How strongly I was tempted to disappear, to slip away from the cross, to free Mary Victim from her agony! Only one idea made me hesitate – the thought of my daughters! Before Jesus I felt free. But before these poor souls, no, I could not feel free.

Following these trials and the injustices Helene reflected on her religious upbringing:

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242 Cf. Ibid., 137.
244 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 369-430. Contact was made with the Sisters who survived when the Chinese government again allowed foreigners to visit the country.
245 Ibid.
246 Helene de Chappotin, Letter to the Sisters 18 June 1897, in *A Mother’s Journal to Her Daughters, Year 1897*, 55.
247 Helene de Chappotin, in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *Mary of the Passion*, 81.
I was given a false education on certain points and to that I attribute my interior troubles. I was allowed to be too unaware of the miseries of the earth; priests and kings were presented to me as being impeccable, and the pages in history that could have enlightened me on this subject were passed over.\footnote{\textsuperscript{248}}

In her last letter to the Sisters Helene wrote:

\begin{quote}
If you only knew, if you understood what it means to be consecrated to God. God says to us: ‘You are made for love, not only for time, but also for eternity… I have chosen you for this love, this glory.’ Meditate well on this: ‘I am consecrated to God, my end is love.’\footnote{\textsuperscript{249}}
\end{quote}

Helene died at San Remo, Italy, on 15 November, 1904, during one of her frequent visits to the communities throughout Europe. Her name was cleared by Vatican authorities again, and she was beatified in 2002.\footnote{\textsuperscript{250}}

**Summary**

Helene’s deep desire was that the Sisters be properly trained spiritually and professionally. The Sisters continued this practice of their Foundress, so that those going to distant lands would be qualified to assist the people effectively as Helene had wished.

Keeping to their Foundress’ directions, the Sisters were not only to carry out acts of charity but also challenge the root causes of the problems the people faced. They were to ensure just wages for all who worked with them, and fair prices for goods from the workrooms as their Foundress had insisted. By these means the Sisters strove to improve the physical as well as spiritual lives of those whom they served.

The original dream of Helene to have all the Sisters go anywhere to live amongst the people, would not be fully realised until 1960. This was achieved when the Oblate Sisters were fully incorporated into the Institute, fifty-six years after her death.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{248} Cf. Launay, *Helene de Chappotin*, 45.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{249} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 45.}
Following the incorporation into the Franciscan family, the spirituality of mission that Helene taught was to live the Gospel by carrying on the mission of Mary of giving Christ to the world. The Sisters did this by taking up their Foundress’ vision of being contemplatives-in-action. This remains as an important foundation stone of the Institute. The promotion and care of women and children also remains a priority of the Institute.

The Charism as handed down by Helene was based on her strong Catholic faith, her social setting and her earlier experiences of religious life. The style of the Charism was devotional and institutional, as seen in Chapters One to Four. The prayer-style was based on European practices and piety. Helene repeatedly spoke of the need for unity between the Sisters themselves for the survival of the Institute. The importance of unity stressed by the Foundress was grounded in the vow of obedience. Not all the Sisters were educated, and hence the need for the Sisters who had education to be the Superiors. This was also reflective of the manner of life in society at that time, where women were not generally educated. This changed over the years and led to a new period in the Institute. It was not as yet realised that the Eurocentric culture and Western style of prayer and attire was an obstacle to the development of the Institute or in fact the Church itself. These issues would only be addressed slowly, following the Sisters’ encounters with other peoples in their missionary work, and in response to the Second Vatican Council. Hence, the following chapter will explore how the heritage that Helene left her Sisters continued to guide them during the first half of the twentieth century as they responded to the needs encountered and to the signs of the times.
CHAPTER SIX

The Missiology of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary from the Foundress’ Death until the Second Vatican Council

Overview

Following the Foundress’ death on 15 November 1904, a Sister who had left the Reparatrice with Helene and the others, Jeanne de Geslin de Bourgogne, (Mother Marie de la Redemption) replaced Helene as Superior General [1904-1917]. Jeanne de Geslin was a fellow Breton and a close friend of Helene. Having been in close contact with Helene from the early days in India, she was a faithful companion and missionary after Helene’s own heart.

Besides the ministries carried out by the Sisters during the war periods, the variety of languages spoken by the Sisters at the Mother house in Rome enabled the Sisters to be of service in the Vatican in its outreach to all sides of the conflict.

Since Helene’s death there have been numerous catastrophic events on a world-wide scale. Besides the two World Wars during the first half of the twentieth century, there were various wars for dominance or independence in several nations which had led to the displacement of millions of people seeking safety or a better life. All of these conflicts caused an untold number of deaths and the disruption of millions of people. The horror of the holocaust of so many Jewish people brought a concerted effort by the Sisters to save as many of the Jewish population left in Europe as possible. All these events had an impact on the evolution of the missiology of the Sisters calling them out of their enclosures to assist those in need.

This Chapter will trace the trajectory of the various impacts upon the Sisters’ missiology, from 1904, following Helene’s death, until the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65. Some of the major influences were papal documents which addressed the needs of the missionary Church in the world. It will also show the way in which the Sisters treasured Helene’s vision of the Institute.
A very influential apostolic letter addressing ‘mission’ was written by Pope Benedict XV in 1919 entitled *Maximum Illud*.1 The Pope stated that his purpose in writing this letter was to express his deep concern for vast number of peoples not yet reached with the Christian message. The Pope wrote: “According to a recent estimate, the number of non-believers in the world approximates one billion souls…The pitiable lot of this stupendous number of souls is for Us a source of great sorrow” [# 6, 7].

In their reflection on this document, the Sisters saw that it “succeeded in arousing energy after the tempest (war) and in giving clear and vigorous objectives for all.”2 The Sisters also pointed out “two sensitive points which the Pope accented strongly. First and foremost, nationalism should be avoided…and… countries are still deprived of native clergy…”3 These two issues were of deep concern to Helene as she wrote in her letters to the Sisters.4

The Pope’s document stated very clearly the need to be aware of the danger of nationalism:

> We have been deeply saddened by some recent accounts of missionary life, accounts that displayed more zeal for the profit of some particular nation than for the growth of the kingdom of God…the missionary is always aware that he is not working as an agent of his country, but as an ambassador of Christ. And his conduct is such that it is perfectly obvious to anyone watching him that he represents a Faith that is alien to no nation on earth, since it embraces all men who worship God in spirit and in truth..5

The Sisters were aware of the danger of interference by colonial governments and had been warned against it by their Foundress.6

Another aspect of the document which the Sisters stressed was the call by the Pope for the formation of local clergy, for which their Foundress had striven. As shown in her support for

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3 Ibid.
4 Cf. Chapter Five, *Assisting the Society of St Peter the Apostle*.
6 Cf. Chapter Five on *The Influence of Colonialism on Mission*.
Madame Bigard’s organization, the Society of St Peter the Apostle, Helene’s concern went beyond local vocations for her own Institute and extended her efforts to the whole Church. The Pope expressed his deep concern for the adequate formation of local vocations: “And yet it is a deplorable fact that, even after the Popes have insisted upon it, there still remain sections of the world that have heard the Faith preached for several centuries, and still have a local clergy that is of inferior quality” [#17]. The Sisters continued their Foundress’ concern for encouraging the formation of local clergy, managing the fundraising for the Society of St Peter the Apostle as mentioned above.7

In 1926, Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical Rerum Ecclesiae8 explained the benefits of this Society of St Peter the Apostle for the education of local clergy:9

The object of the Society of St. Peter the Apostle is, by means of prayers and free-will gifts, to make it possible for certain specially chosen native ecclesiastical students to receive the required seminary training preparatory to the taking of Holy Orders [#16].

Pope Pius XI continued:

How can the Church among the heathens be developed today unless it be built of those very elements out of which our own churches were built; that is to say, unless it be made up of people, clergy, and religious orders of men and women recruited from the native populations of the several regions? Why should the native clergy be forbidden to cultivate their own portion of the Lord's vineyard, be forbidden to govern their own people? [#21].

More than one hundred years prior to the publication of the Apostolic Letter, Maximum Illud [1919], a laywoman, Pauline Jaricot, had founded the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1817, to raise funds for missionary activity. The historian, Stephen Neill, in his work on Christian Missions, included a quote from the Annals of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith regarding Pauline’s work:

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7 Cf. Chapter Five, Local Vocations.
9 Cf. Chapter Five, Welcoming Local Vocations.
The work in support of the *Propagation of the Faith*, first organised by Pauline Jaricot at Lyons in 1817, spread rapidly in many countries, and made available to the missions the contributions of innumerable humble people...A missionary periodical...to instruct people and solicit their prayers...\(^{10}\)

The Pope, writing after the Society’s headquarters were moved to the Vatican, sought support for this organisation:

> All Christian people should assist, and generously, the work of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the principal mission organization of the Church. With due regard for the very pious woman who was its foundress, and the City of Lyons, its seat, We have transferred to Rome the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. We have also reorganized it, conferred upon it, as it were, Roman citizenship, and given it charge of meeting all the present needs of the missions, as well as those that will arise in the future [\#14)]

Pauline Jaricot is an excellent example of lay involvement in the mission of the Church, and a guide for the Sisters in their cooperation with lay women. The Sisters repeated their Foundress’ emphasis on the formation of the laity and their involvement in the work of the spreading the Gospel.

The work of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith also needed the support of the laity:

> It seems to Us that two special objectives ought to be aimed at in all missionary work...namely, that a much larger number than heretofore of missionaries, well trained in the different fields of knowledge, be sent into the vast regions which are still deprived of the civilizing influence of the Christian religion; and secondly, that the faithful be brought to understand with what zeal, constancy in prayer, and with what generosity they too must co-operate in a work which is so holy and fruitful [\#3].

In this way the laity were encouraged to take their part in the spread of the Catholic faith. However, this was still viewed as prayers and financial assistance. Later, their role would be extended and recognised as vital to the entire missionary work.\(^{11}\)


**Rerum Ecclesiae**

In 1926 Pope Pius XI wrote an encyclical, *Rerum Ecclesiae*[^12] to encourage missionary work throughout the Church: “The Church has no other reason for existence than, by developing the Kingdom of Christ on earth, to make mankind participate in the effects of His saving Redemption.” [#1]. The Pope continued, stressing that no one is to be forgotten: “...no one can be thought so poor and naked, no-one so infirm or hungry, as he who is deprived of the knowledge and grace of God...” [#14].

In his Encyclical Pius XI outlined two particular aims:

…two special objectives ought to be aimed at in all missionary work…that a much larger number than heretofore of missionaries, well trained in the different fields of knowledge, be sent into the vast regions which are still deprived of the civilizing influence of the Christian religion; and secondly, that the faithful be brought to understand with what zeal, constancy in prayer, and with what generosity they too must co-operate in a work which is so holy and fruitful [#3].

The Sisters found in these statements support for the work they were already doing alongside the laity. In an account of their history covering 1920 to 1931, they wrote of Pius XI: “In the first decade of his pontificate, he was the Pope of Catholic Action, the Pope of universality, the Pope of the Lateran Agreement…”[^13]

Following the Second World War, the next pope suggested changes which enhanced the life of religious men and women, doing away with many outdated practices. These changes freed the religious men and women, especially the Sisters, to be able to live a life more in keeping with the times and the cultures in which they found themselves.

**Changes to Religious Life Proposed by Pope Pius XII**

The Pope who succeeded Pius XI, Pius XII [1939-1958], advised the updating of various customs in religious life. This initiated a process of renewal and opened new and more fruitful means of contact between religious and the laity. In his 1950 Apostolic Constitution, *Sponsa*


Pope Pius XII suggested that the practices of Religious which were meaningless or no longer necessary, or if there were no particular reasons for retaining them, could be discarded. Changes were made following the publication of *Sponsa Christi* which simplified the Sisters’ lives. In this document, the Sisters found Papal support for the changes they had wished: to be able to live and work closer to the people.

A major adjustment the Pope made was regarding the rule of enclosure. The full Papal enclosure remained for the enclosed Orders such as the Poor Clares, but a second category was introduced, that of minor enclosure for Religious who worked outside their convents among the people. The enclosure remained the rule only within the convent itself, thus enabling the Sisters to move out of their compounds and live and minister among the people.

Other changes the Sisters wished to make regarded the “long vocal prayers, the rule of two for going out…and an ensemble of customs which the calls of evangelisation and the signs of the times were urging us to revise…” In his Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi*, the Pope had called for “the elimination of out-dated customs and clothing that estranged them from those they served.” The Sisters thus requested that the habit be optional as it was seen as alienating and foreign in non-European countries, but it was again rejected by *Propaganda*.

Pope Pius XII strongly fostered the method of mission which recognised and respected the local cultures and religions. In his Encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*, the Pope developed further the importance of respect which the Sisters had been taught by Helene to embrace:

…let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful…This is the reason why the Catholic Church has neither scorned nor rejected the pagan philosophies. Instead, after freeing them from error and all contamination she has perfected and completed them by Christian revelation…. By no means has she repressed native customs and traditions but has given them a certain religious

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15 Ibid., #22.
16 Ibid., #32.
18 Pius XII, *Sponsa Christi*, #22.
19 Ibid., 189. Requests to modify the habit and/or make it optional were made in 1960s and again in the 1970s. Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and its Risks*, 189.
significance; she has even transformed their feast days and made them serve to commemorate the martyrs and to celebrate mysteries of the faith.\(^{20}\)

This approach to evangelisation, a major change from previous attitudes of superiority over other cultures and religions, was still mostly one-sided. Yet this challenged the general presumption of the Sisters of the superiority of their own religion, Catholicism, and their culture, European. This brought an important dimension to the Sisters’ evolving missiology which included the study of other religions and cultures. The Sisters, encouraged by Pius XII in 1943, began to update themselves in biblical and theological studies:

(Pius XII)…urged the Superiors General of the Regular Orders and of the religious Congregations, as well as the Bishops of the Catholic world, to send the more suitable of their students to frequent the schools of the Biblical Institute and obtain there the academical degrees, he confirmed these exhortations by his own example, appointing out of his bounty an annual sum for this very purpose.\(^{21}\)

The Pope continued:

[The Catholic scholar ought to] ...acquire daily a greater facility in biblical as well as in other oriental languages In like manner therefore ought we to explain the original text which, having been written by the inspired author himself, has more authority and greater weight than any even the very best translation, whether ancient or modern; this can be done all the more easily and fruitfully, if to the knowledge of languages be joined a real skill in literary criticism of the same text.\(^{22}\)

In 1926 the previous pope, Pius XI, instituted a university “for Italian religious women where they could both study and live their religious life.”\(^{23}\) The University was founded in 1926 at Castelnuovo Fogliani in Milan with the support of Fr Agostino Gemelli and his collaborator Armida Barelli. The women lived on campus during their studies and FMM Sisters assumed overall responsibility for this establishment until 1975 when it was closed.\(^{24}\) "The superior


\(^{22}\) Ibid., #16.

\(^{23}\) Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 500.

assumed overall responsibility for the sisters of different congregations, respecting the
charism of each one.”

In 1939 there were more than one hundred religious from thirty different Institutes studying
at this university. Previously, most women’s congregations worked separately, each having
their own particular ministry in a particular diocese. This university was an opportunity for
the sisters themselves to work together. It also allowed the FMM Sisters to continue their
Foundress’ aim of each one receiving a proper education in the fields in which they
ministered.

Pope Pius XII encouraged cooperation between Religious Congregations in their various
ministries, as is clear from the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) website:

The roots of UISG are actually to be found in the pontificate of Pope Pius XII
who called an extraordinary meeting in 1951 of superiors general who had
generalates in Rome. The purpose of this meeting was to initiate national councils
of religious. In fact, the Rome group did begin to meet and it is the result of their
meeting which established Regina Mundi, the pontifical institution which first
allowed women religious to study theology in Rome.

The Sisters have been members of this Union since its beginning. One of the FMM Sisters
was a Director of the above-mentioned Regina Mundi. Many other FMM Sisters also studied
there. These studies, particularly in Scripture, enhanced the Sisters’ missionary life, opening
them to a deeper understanding of the Gospel message and their missionary task.

Pius XII also encouraged cooperation amongst the missionary Congregations: “So, too, in
the missions, do not hesitate to summon to your aid as your co-workers missionaries who are
not of your own religious family.” This cooperation would take some years to be achieved
for many of the mission territories were confided to particular Orders. A bishop in charge of
a particular mission would usually apply to one religious community for assistance.
Therefore, the Sisters did not go to areas where other missionary Sisters were present. For

26 Ibid., 501.
/word061705.htm#TopOfPage (accessed 19 October, 2015).
29 Pius XII, Evangeli Praecones, #55.
instance, the FMM Sisters have not gone to the South Pacific nations such as Fiji as another Congregation was already strongly present there. They also did not go to New Zealand as another Franciscan Congregation was active there.\(^{30}\) This was decided in accordance with the founding charism to go primarily to those to whom Christ has not yet been revealed. Following the Second Vatican Council the Sisters cooperated more closely with other religious congregations as recommended.\(^{31}\)

**Ministries of the Sisters in the early Twentieth Century**

Following the example of their Foundress, the Sisters responded to the needs they encountered in accordance with their charism, although they mainly concentrated on the traditional ministries for women and children. The main areas of ministry for the Sisters continued to be health, education and care of orphans. Due to the disasters of war, the Sisters expanded their services accordingly as the needs presented themselves.

**Health Ministry**

**Ministry during Two World Wars**

With the outbreak of the Great War in Europe (1914-1918) the health ministry of the Sisters in Europe was greatly expanded. A number of the Sisters’ convents were opened in their attempts to assist the wounded, the dying and refugees where possible. The Sisters waived the rule regarding the cloister to be able to assist those in need, following the practice of their Foundress who had opened the house in Rome to pilgrims:

> Here and there in Europe as in Rome, the houses were organized to receive the wounded… In Naples, Florence and Milan the Sisters worked in the military hospitals…(and cared) for the wounded in Austria, Belgium and France…Some 600 sisters, and more, would be at the service of the wounded and the refugees in both camps, including Russia, Turkey and Bulgaria. Twenty-four houses of the Institute were situated in countries at war.\(^{32}\)

Besides the above-mentioned convents, the Sisters opened their novitiate house in Brittany, France, their Mother House in Rome, the house at Grottaferrata some kilometres outside of

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\(^{31}\) Cf. Chapter Seven, “The Second Vatican Council and Its Influence on the Sisters’ Missiology.”

\(^{32}\) Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 74.
Rome, the houses in Turin, Florence, Milan, and other houses throughout Europe. The house-journal of the Grottaferrata community outside of Rome reported the arrival of some wounded soldiers in this way: “Poor boys, leaving the hospital, cured, and with the hope of spending a month’s leave at home, find themselves instead in a convent! The number gradually increased to 200…the hospital was closed in 1920.”

The Sisters who had tended the wounded during the 1914-1918 War were criticised by certain survivors: “The sisters,” they said, “cared for everyone – and the Greek doctors found it difficult to forgive them for nursing the Turks, and vice versa.” Regardless of such opposition, the Sisters continued their service, for they saw this as their way of fulfilling their mission as outlined by their Foundress.

Many of the Sisters nursing the wounded were also coming across conditions such as cholera and typhus. Some of the Sisters contracted these diseases and died from them. Other Sisters died during bombing raids. For instance, fourteen Sisters died in Algeria when a bomb destroyed an orphanage. The Sisters had been able to get the children into the bomb shelter but were not in time to save themselves. The Sisters saw that their ministry was not only assisting those in need but, when necessary, giving their lives as well. This offering of one’s life was seen vividly when the Foundress responded to the shocking news of the beheading of seven of her Sisters in China in 1900 during the Boxer uprising: “Now I can truly say I have seven true Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.”

A Second World War followed in 1939 and lasted until 1945. Again, the Sisters responded as they were able, intimately involving themselves with the sufferings of many people throughout this war period. As during the First World War, the Sisters were able to give expression to the aim of their Institute of spreading the love of God: “Go…proclaim…that Jesus is love.” When Austria was taken over by Hitler’s army, the Sisters were strictly supervised, but were still able to nurse the wounded. They stayed with the people, suffering

34 Maddelena Lainati, FMM, “Rome - even Grottaferrata celebrated the centenary of the ‘Great War,’ in Meeting Space, January-February 2015, 2-3. This site was used as a convalescent hospital.
35 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and Its Risks, 458.
37 Helene de Chappotin, in Mary of the Passion, 430. These Sisters were beheaded during the Boxer Uprising in China, 1900, along with over 100 other local Catholics. They were canonised on 1 October, 2000.
38 Helene de Chappotin, quoted in An Apostle Sent by God, 6.
the depravations of war with them as they saw this as their way of fulfilling their commitment to their Foundress’ aim of the Institute.³⁹

During the World Wars the Sisters were ministering not only in Europe but also in Africa and Asia. These continents were also the battle grounds for German and Japanese hegemony. Russian and Chinese communism infiltrated whole continents through a variety of avenues, destroying the local cultures and religions. The Sisters remained ministering to the people whenever they were able, according to their Charism received from their Foundress.

The Japanese government had begun to intern all the missionaries in Japan who were citizens of the enemy countries of the United States of America, Britain, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Holland and Belgium. Sister Kyoiku Koho Sya, FMM, wrote of that era: “Although these countries warned their citizens to leave Japan before the war, 597 Catholic expatriate missionaries remained in the mission. Among 342 expatriate religious were 64 FMM.”⁴⁰ The Sisters in these areas who were not expelled continued their ministries as best they could. Despite the ravages of war, “a total of sixty young Sisters received the habit or made profession at the Totsuka and Kiyose novitiates.”⁴¹

**Post-World War Health Ministries**

The Church had forbidden religious women to study medicine or to assist at births until 1936. An English doctor, Anna Dengel, was attracted to the Institute when she worked with Sisters in their hospital of St Catherine’s in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, in 1920. She discovered that the Sisters were very limited in the services the Church officials would allow them to offer. As a result, she founded the Medical Mission Sisters who were eventually given permission to study medicine and obstetrics.⁴² In 1930 the FMMs handed over one of their hospitals in Pakistan to the Medical Mission Sisters, and continued their other ministries there.⁴³ Dr Dengel, following the same practice of the FMMs, wrote: “The people must never get the idea that conversion and baptism are necessary to reward your devoted care.”⁴⁴

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⁴¹ Ibid., 225.
⁴⁴ Quoted in Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic history*, 104.
The ban on studying medicine and assisting at births having been lifted, the Sisters in Pakistan expanded the hospital they administered to include a midwifery school. Two FMM doctors worked there.\(^{45}\) An Australian Sister, Madonna Purcell, FMM, began a midwifery school after arriving in Malaysia in 1956.\(^{46}\)

In Vietnam, for instance, the leprosarium founded by French Fr. Paul Maheu, was handed over to the Sisters in 1933. However, following the takeover of the country by communists, the foreign Sisters were expelled from the country, and now local Sisters are permitted to visit the leprosarium on only one day a week. “Hospital officials try to limit the nuns' involvement in the hospital because the sisters struggle for patients' rights and demand for transparency and accountability.”\(^{47}\) The Sisters continue today to take in food and clothing donated by others who knew of the Sisters’ work.\(^{48}\) They do this continuing their Foundress’ concern for all peoples, especially lepers.

During the many struggles for independence by previously colonised nations, many of the foreign Sisters were expelled. In Burma the foreign Sisters were forced to leave, the last departing in 1966,\(^ {49}\) yet this was an opportunity for the local Sisters to take over the leadership and evolve the Institute’s charism and add to the universal expression of it.

Following the harrowing experiences of war and the demands on the Sisters nursing the wounded with such extreme injuries, the Superior General, Marie Marguerite du Sacre Coeur, [1932-1960] reinforced the call of the Foundress herself for the Sisters to be professionally trained since this was their missionary task. At the Congress of Catholic Nurses, held in Paris in 1935, she stressed the importance of a solid professional formation for all missionaries. She shared her experience as a missionary with the women gathered from various religious Congregations, basing her talk on her first-hand knowledge of health problems in mission countries. Her talk was entitled: “The Role of the missionary nurse and the necessity for a

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 297.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
\(^{49}\) Anne Kathleen Mahoney FMM was the last Australian to be expelled in 1966. She had been in Burma for 18 years. She later went to Papua New Guinea for 16 years. Cf. Scanlon, *The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 338.
specialized preparation.”

Mother M du Sacre Couer continued Helene’s emphasis on the importance of a solid professional as well as spiritual preparation for missionary life.

A new initiative occurred in 1932 when the Pope, Pius XI, spoke for the first time on Vatican Radio. It was the occasion when he declared one of the Sisters who had died in China, Maria Assunta Pallotta, ‘venerable’. Broadcasting via the radio was subsequently used by the popes as a means of reaching out to the world. The Sisters worked at the Vatican offices assisting with translations. Yet it was many years before they accepted the usefulness of radio and computers for their own manner of communication.

Besides the chaos in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, there were revolutions in countries such as Russia, Portugal and China. When Russia came under Communist rule, Sisters who were wearing habits were expelled from the country in 1913, and so the habit was exchanged for lay clothing to be able to pass unnoticed. Some Sisters were sent in exile to Siberia, others imprisoned and subsequently exiled. The last FMM left Russia in 1922 and they were unable to return until 1993.

The revolution in Portugal in 1910 resulted in the Sisters being expelled from the country: “…the events…had driven out the King, Don Manuel II, and all the men and women religious.” Some of the Sisters narrowly missed execution. When an Army Officer saw that they were about to be killed, he intervened and escorted them to a nearby station, sending them into Spain. The Sisters were able to return to Portugal in 1917 although in lay clothing.

Mao Tse Tung [1893-1976] took control of China in 1947 and many of the local Sisters were imprisoned. Between 1951 and 1953 the foreign Sisters were ordered to leave the country, many after also having been imprisoned. The Chinese Sisters who were not imprisoned were scattered, some able to go back to their home villages. Today it has been possible to re-connect with the Chinese Sisters still living. They had continued their religious life as best they could under the circumstances, without any communication with other Sisters, either

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51 Cf. Ibid., 141, 142.
52 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, “Events, situations … marking the course of the 20th Century,” 16.
54 Cf. Ibid., 581.
55 Cf. Ibid., 369-421.
inside China or outside. Despite the severe control and scrutiny, there were still young women who wished to enter the Institute.

Following the desire of Helene never to refuse a request to minister in leprosaria, the Sisters continued these services. With the discovery of a successful substance to treat leprosy, Sulphur, they were now better equipped to manage their ministry. An example of the successful treatment with sulphur for leprosy patients is the leprosarium on Fantome Island, off the eastern coast of Australia. This facility was opened in 1940 for mainly the Indigenous sufferers but also for White Australians. These were isolated there until they were cured or died of the disease. “From the 1930s it (Fantome Island) became a leprosarium as well as a health screening centre for everyone sent to Palm (Island).” The author continued: “The overwhelming majority of patients detained on Fantome were suffering from diseases not known to Indigenous people prior to the arrival of Europeans.”

The Government administrator of the island was antagonistic towards the Sisters calling them “dago disturbers.” This was because there existed strong divisions between the Catholics and other Christians on the island. The hospital was managed by the Sisters from 1945 until it was closed in 1973 when only six patients remained. The Australian government transferred these patients to hospitals on the mainland. The Sisters continued their ministry with the Indigenous peoples, according to the example of their Foundress, on the neighbouring island, Palm Island. The Sisters ran a primary school there, and opened a home for the elderly. The Sisters served the Indigenous in various ministries also on the mainland in Mt Isa, Alice Springs, and Collie in Western Australia. The Sisters worked with the Indigenous peoples, particularly encouraging education in hygiene and other medical issues. They carried out this ministry in accordance with their Foundress’ aim of going to the poorest.

56 Joanne Watson, Palm Island Through a Long Lens. (Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2010), 92.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 83. The term ‘Dago’ was a derogatory word used by white Australians for olive-skinned European immigrants; eg., the Italians, Greeks and Lebanese.
Education and Care of Orphans and Refugees

The Foundress had understood that education is an essential means of liberating people from poverty and dependency as well as an excellent way of witnessing to the love of God. The Sisters, as part of their missionary commitment, continued this service. They also cared for others who had no one to care for them. Thus, orphans and refugees were of particular concern to the Sisters.

Following the earthquake in Sicily of 1908 which destroyed the town of Messina, the Sisters cared for the orphans. The pope at the time, Pius X, asked the Sisters for help. He opened one of the Vatican buildings at Monteverde to accommodate some of these orphans and the Sisters cared for them there. The small children were sheltered at the Sisters’ convent at Grottaferrata outside of Rome, the older ones in Rome itself at the Sisters’ head house at Via Giusti, and the ‘in-betweens’ were housed at the Vatican property at Monteverde. The education of the children was continued as the circumstances allowed. Also in 1915 when an earthquake destroyed the village of Avezzano, Italy, killing 15,000 inhabitants, the Sisters immediately responded providing what care they could. These services were carried out as part of the Sisters’ understanding of their missionary charism.

In keeping with the Sisters’ founding aim of ministering whenever possible to whomever was in need, the Sisters ran schools for survivors of the First World War and cared for orphans, among other places, in their convent at Trastevere in Rome. They also cared for several survivors of the massacre of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 when roughly 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians died. The education of the orphans continued over the years “even to university level for some.”

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61 Cf. Ibid., 68.  
62 Cf. Ibid., 69.  
63 Ibid.  
64 Ibid., 74.  
66 “Armenian Genocide Centennial,” “But this does not change the fact that roughly 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians died as a direct result of the Young Turks’ actions and policies.” http://armeniangenocide100.org/en/turkish-scholar-no-word-but-genocide-captures-the-scale-and-depth-of-this-destruction/ (accessed 22 April, 2015).  
67 In For the Mission and its Risks, 69.
As a result of the wars and the Russian Revolution which began in 1917, there were many displaced persons seeking security and shelter. Countries such as Australia, with a vast territory yet a small population, saw the chance for expansion through immigration:

...between 1911 and 1929 the levels of migration were relatively high, apart from during the war years. The Commonwealth Government and the states sought to recruit migrants for the new nation at a time of increasing tensions in Europe in the years before the First World War and then continued recruitment of migrants in the years after the war.68

**The Sisters’ Efforts to Save Jews from Nazis**

While Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) has been accused of doing little to save Jews from the Nazis during the Second World War, the true nature of his endeavours was recognised by many Jews themselves:

In *Summi Pontificatus* his first encyclical as Pope, Pius XII specifically rejected Nazism and expressly mentioned the Jews, noting that in the Catholic Church there is “neither Gentile nor Jew.”...When Pius died in 1958, Israel's Foreign Minister Golda Meir said: “When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims.”69

According to historian Martin Gilbert,

When the Nazis came to Rome in search of Jews... (in September, 1943)... [Pius XII had]... a few days earlier personally ordered the Vatican clergy to open the sanctuaries of the Vatican City to all ‘non-Aryans’ in need of refuge. By morning of October 16, a total of 477 Jews had been given shelter in the Vatican and its enclaves, while another 4,238 had been given sanctuary in the many monasteries and convents in Rome. Only 1,015 of Rome's 6,730 Jews were seized that morning.70

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The same source added: “On papal instructions, 4000 Jews were hidden in Italian monasteries and convents, and 2000 Hungarian Jews given fake documents identifying them as Catholics.”

The Sisters were among many others who had already opened their doors to the Jewish residents fleeing the Nazi round-up of Jews in many countries in Europe. As the Sisters’ account stated: “Sr. Esther Busnelli fmm (then Mother Sandra), opened the doors of our convent from September onwards to women and children who were fleeing from places where there already was persecution…” In doing this, the Sisters were following the example of their Foundress by offering hospitality in the house in Rome to pilgrims.

The Sisters wrote formal reports following the War. One of the reports contained the following:

As the emergency continued, Monsignor Meneghello, secretary of Cardinal Dalla Costa, asked the nuns readiness to accept Jewish women and children… But some Jews had sought refuge in early September. In the report of the sisters the Superior speaks of fifty (50) guests, other witnesses can count from eighty to a hundred.

As can be seen, the Sisters had acted immediately and later heard of the advice from the Vatican. A Jewish historian wrote:

…the mortal risk to the rescuers in the rescue of Jewish children cannot be overemphasized. It transcended the nuns’ vows, and no religious authority instructed the convents to engage in these actions.

In the Sisters’ convents some of the Jewish women were dressed in habits and thus saved. Whilst many were ultimately saved, sadly some were detected following raids by the Nazis and Italian police on the convents. For example, in one of the Sisters’ convents in Florence approximately 120 Jewish women and children were being hidden. Twenty-four of them

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71 Ibid., Gilbert, quoted in “Rescue of Jews by Catholics during the Holocaust.”
73 Cf. Chapter Five, The Institute Develops Roots.
74 History of the FMM in Italy (Private publication).
77 Records were not kept of names for fear of discovery.
were discovered and taken to Auschwitz following one of these raids. It was later discovered that they had been betrayed by a neighbour.\textsuperscript{78} As one of the survivors, Sara Cividalli, who had been hidden in the Sisters’ convent in Florence, said: “The convents did not welcome Jews because the Cardinal requested it, but also because love urged them to do so.”\textsuperscript{79} This care of the Jews was carried out under the inspiration of their Foundress in her concern for all peoples.

In 2014 there was a reunion of survivors who had been saved by the Sisters in their convent in Florence. The president of the Jewish Community of Florence, Mrs. Sara Cividalli, said “…how important it was to shed light on the past and at the same time offer a lesson to future generations, for awareness.”\textsuperscript{80} The Sisters were later recognised as “Righteous among the Nations” in 1993 by Jewish officials for their work in saving many Jews.\textsuperscript{81} Yet their efforts were seen by them as an important aspect of their ministry according to the Gospel way of life.

Once hostilities ceased, the Sisters were able to enter the concentration camps in Germany, Austria and Poland. They had been chosen to be part of the Vatican Mission of assistance to the survivors because of their activities on behalf of others during the war.\textsuperscript{82} These services were continuing the charism given by their Foundress to care for the poorest and most needy.

European refugees also from the Second World War sought safety and a new life in places such as Oceania, the Americas, and South Africa. Australia’s population increased dramatically during this time: “…this post-war migration added to the number of Australians across almost all age groups, with the largest gains among younger adults. For example, the cohort of people aged 15–19 years in 1944 had increased by an extra 83,900 people.”\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[78] In “Le FMM accolgono gli Ebrei Ricercati” [“The FMM welcome Wanted Jews”] unfinished history of the Sisters in Italy, Sisters’ History Office, Rome.
\item[79] Sara Cividalli, in “The Just will always be remembered” in FMM Meeting Space VII/61-62.
\item[80] Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Meeting Space, March/April, 2014, 14, 15.
\item[81] Ibid.
\item[82] Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and its Risks, 156.
\end{footnotes}
Jewish refugees also came to Australia in large numbers: “From 1933 to 1939, Australia absorbed between 7,000-8,000 Jewish refugees from Nazism, many from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Over 5,000 arrived in 1939.”

**The Sisters Arrival in Australia**

In 1941 during the Second World War the Sisters came to Australia. This was the fulfilment of their Foundress’ desire to have Sisters on each of the Continents. Their aim at first was to seek vocations for the Institute and to provide a place where ill missionaries working in the southern hemisphere could recover. This foundation saw the fulfilment of the Foundress’ deep desire: to have Sisters ministering on all the continents. They arranged for Sisters of various European nationalities to come to Australia to work with the migrants, helping them to settle into their new homeland: Italian, Maltese Filipino, Hispanic, Chinese, Indonesian, Egyptian, Singhalese and Japanese Sisters came within a few years of each other.

The Sisters in Australia soon saw that they could make a contribution to all Australians after learning that only ‘white’ people were accepted as immigrants because of the ‘white Australia’ policy enacted in 1901: “…politicians warned there would be no place for 'Asiatics' or 'coloureds' in the Australia of the future.” This was a profound insult to the original Australians who are dark-skinned, but were classed as children, ‘protected’ by being moved onto reservations. They were not counted in the Census, and not given recognition as citizens until the 1967 referendum, “…which many people see as a major turning point in the achievement of Indigenous citizenship rights.”

The Sisters continue working to overcome this discrimination through their education and health services amongst the Indigenous Australians, and in their ministries with all Australians. In this way they fulfilled their commitment to their charism. The Sisters continue to support the Indigenous Australians who are still seeking full recognition through a Treaty

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85 Cf. Helene de Chappotin, in Memoirs, 325.
with the Australian government to recognise them as the original inhabitants. They carry out this ministry following their Foundress’ example of service to the poor.

Seeing the need for religious education of Australian Catholics, the Sisters began schools, retreat centres, a hospital for disabled children, and they worked with new immigrants and assisted in parishes. These ministries were begun under the impetus of the Foundress’ vision.

While the contribution that migrants have made to the size of Australia's population has been substantial, perhaps of greater importance is the diversity of cultural backgrounds of these people and the effect this has had on Australia's cultural and social development. Other nations such as England, Canada and the United States of America also benefitted from the migrations from Europe. Sisters of various nationalities were sent as missionaries to these host countries to minister to the various migrant groups. They helped them to adjust to their new country and provided spiritual as well as psychological assistance to those who had suffered so much, firstly during the war itself, then after having to leave their homeland. In Australia, for instance, a community was set up to work with the new arrivals with Sisters from Spain, Holland, France and Australia, with seven languages between them. In this way the Sisters saw themselves being faithful to their missionary vocation of manifesting the love of God through their life of service.

By 1939 the Sisters were present in 35 countries and thus were able to continue their efforts for world peace through caring for the needy. The Sisters worked with Church officials to do what they could to bring about peace between the warring nations. They also cooperated with the Vatican information bureau which strove to get news of prisoners or deportees to their families throughout Italy. Again, the Sisters’ facility with various languages was of great assistance in this service.

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91 Cf. for example, Ibid.

Peace Efforts following the Wars

After the First World War, in 1920, the League of Nations was formed to provide a forum to attempt to resolve international disputes. Prior to this organisation, there had been the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 which were attempts to establish an international court, but both failed to prevent further wars. 93“The idea of the League was grounded in the broad, international revulsion against the unprecedented destruction of the First World War.” 94 As one source explained; “The only way to avoid a repetition of such a disaster, was to create an international body whose sole purpose was to maintain world peace and which would sort out international disputes as and when they occurred. This would be the task of the League of Nations.” 95 Sadly, the League of Nations also was unable to prevent another worldwide war.

Following the Second World War, another effort was made to create a union of nations with the aim of promoting world peace and cooperation. It hoped “to establish economic, social and cultural cooperation among the nations.” 96 This action was an endeavour to stimulate mutual aid with a global scope. Representatives of fifty countries met in 1945 to draw up the United Nations Charter. The Statute of the International Court of Justice is an integral part of this Charter. 97 Due to the Sisters’ international communities, they were able to work with this new Organisation, eventually joining with the Franciscans International at the United Nations. 98

Religious Life Prior to the Second Vatican Council

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), all religious women’s congregations, whether committed to missionary work or not, generally followed the same rule of life:

Within the convent there was no television, no personal access to phones and limited reading material...ringing bells marked long hours of silence, seating for meals was regimented, and every minute of the day was organised around prayer, physical work.... 99

96 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and Its Risks, 139.
98 Cf. Chapter Seven, Collaboration Between Franciscans.
While religious women serving outside the convent were finally recognised as distinct from the enclosed women in 1900, it was not until Pope Pius XII recommended changes in his 1950 Apostolic Constitution, *Sponsa Christi*, that the enclosure was modified and required to be maintained only within the convent itself. This permitted the Sisters to develop a new closeness to the people, being able to go to them instead of waiting for the people to come to them.

Research carried out in the General Archives in the Sisters’ mother house in Rome revealed that only minor changes in this way of life were made at their General Chapters between Helene’s death and the Second Vatican Council. These changes were to the convent life of the Sisters - prayer times and the manner of elections to leadership roles.

Yet there were some additions which expanded the Sisters’ formation programs and ministries. One of the decisive resolutions of the 1911 General Chapter was that, after the first year of their two-year novitiate, the novices would be sent to various countries to further their education. At the same time they would have an experience of living in a culture other than their own. This was very helpful in broadening the horizons of the novices. These decisions also fulfilled the Foundress’ wish that the Sisters receive a solid spiritual and professional formation.

Besides the experience of living in a different culture, some of the novices attended courses which prepared them to carry out their mission according to their Foundress’ aim of all the Sisters receiving a broad formation. For instance, the novices participated in…

- …courses given by the Red Cross to obtain nursing diplomas;
- the ‘technicum’ in Fribourg, [Switzerland] to obtain teaching diplomas;
- diplomas in home economics in Brussels;
- the study of English or other educational courses in London.

In order to conform to the Decree from the Sacred Congregation for Religious of 26 June, 1918, following the codification of Canon Law, it was necessary to make some modifications to the Constitutions. The 1917 Code of Canon Law “gathered up and systematised directives

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100 Cf. Pope Leo XIII, *Conditae a Christo*.
101 Cf. Pius XII, *Sponsa Christi*, #22.
103 Quoted in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 71.
evolved over the previous decades.”\textsuperscript{104} However, research into the documents of the Sisters’ first General Chapter in 1922 following the codification, revealed that these modifications related to the manner of life of the Sisters and did not impact upon their missiology. They were only “…modifications of style and of expression which could lead to various interpretations.”\textsuperscript{105} Yet, rather than assisting the Sisters in their religious life, the Codification of Canon Law brought with it new challenges to adapt to the signs of the times:

Illusions of permanence and of an almost sacral validation of forms of apostolate, customs, modes of dress, expressions of spirituality, became entrenched by the earlier decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, while very able women, as elected leaders and as administrators in their institutes, sought to keep pace with secular education and health care progress in the large institutions they built up and directed.\textsuperscript{106}

The language used within the Institute itself following the death of the Foundress was only French. This was despite the Foundress having stressed on a number of occasions the importance of three main languages, English, French and Italian.\textsuperscript{107} Helene realised from her time in India that the knowledge of the English language was important; that French was useful for within the Institute itself, and that some skill in Italian facilitated the Sisters’ relationships with Vatican officials. A problem arose for Sisters of Asian and African countries whose languages had no Latin roots. To learn any of the Latin-based languages proved a struggle for them. It was not until 1960 that the Sisters began to translate their documents “from French into English and Spanish.”\textsuperscript{108} These three languages then became the official ones for the Institute in 1986: “Each one will strive to learn two of the three official languages of the Institute: English, French and Spanish.”\textsuperscript{109} All the subsequent documents were then to be translated into the local languages as needed. In this way the Sisters continued their Foundress’ desire to retain the languages of the people.

At the General Chapter in 1960, after receiving approval from Propaganda and from the Minister General of the Franciscan Friars, the Sisters voted to have only one degree within the Institute: that of ‘Sister.’\textsuperscript{110} This did away with the title of ‘Mother,’ except for the

\textsuperscript{104} M.R. MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope}, 334.
\textsuperscript{106} MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope}, 334, 335.
\textsuperscript{107} First Constitutions, #17, 10, and repeated in the Constitutions of 1949.
\textsuperscript{108} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 190.
\textsuperscript{109} Cf. \textit{Constitutions of 1986}, # 44, #86.
\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 161
Superior General and the Local Superiors. This would be the realisation of the frequently expressed desire of the Foundress for unity amongst the Sisters. Helene had wished to eliminate altogether within her own Institute the division which existed within the Marie Reparatrice Society: “...the unification of all the F.M.M., doing away with distinctions.”

Whilst the proposal had been accepted by Propaganda earlier, when the decision of the 1960 General Chapter was re-submitted to Propaganda, approval was refused. The secretary of Propaganda had been influenced by certain persons who wished to maintain distinctions within the Institute, because, if this were approved for one Institute it could be seen to be valid for all Congregations.

The Foundress of the Reparatrice had been against removing distinctions amongst the sisters, as can be seen in her correspondence with her sisters in India. It was during the upheavals on the Madurai mission that Mother d’Oultremont had written to the sisters who had contacted her about the situation, as distinct from the mothers: “You do not have any observations to make to me, and I have never needed advice from any of you...I do not need sister councillors.” Permission was finally given by Propaganda and the following written into the 1960 Constitutions: “...all of us, together...are responsible for universal mission.” The Superior General of the day spoke of the joy for the Sisters at this news: “Yes, 10,240, ‘all sisters’ in the joy of a unity that was formerly desired by Mother Mary of the Passion...”

The personal responsibility encouraged here would be re-emphasised at the Ecumenical Council Pope John XXIII inaugurated in 1962.

Before opening the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII called a meeting of religious women in Rome in January 1960, urging them to be more open to the world’s concerns:

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111 Ibid.
112 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and its Risks, 161, 162.
113 Information obtained from a previous Superior General regarding a restricted document in the General Archives.
114 Mother d’Oultremont, in her letter of 11 March, 1876, in Doc. VI: Missionaire en Inde, 1873-1876, Positio Super Virtutibus, Vol I, 356. Mother d’Oultremont wrote three letters on the same day to the Mothers and sisters of the three degrees within her Society.
115 “Approval of the Modifications was given and written into the Constitutions following the General Chapter of 1960,” in the Actes de Capitular Generale, Grottaferrata du 3 au 17 Mai, 1960, Vanves, 16, 17.
No misfortune, no bereavement, no calamity must find you strangers, no scientific discovery, no cultural congress, no social or political meeting should awake in you the idea that these are “things which do not concern us.” ...it is not by prayer alone but also by works that we cause the orientation of society to be inspired by the Gospel...it is necessary to get to move on, to be informed and to have confidence.\textsuperscript{117}

These words of Pope John XXIII echoed Helene’s desire that the Sisters be both contemplatives as well as active missionaries: contemplatives-in-action. Helene had understood clearly the message in the Letter of St James: “Faith without good works is dead” (2:17).\textsuperscript{118}

The challenge from Pope John to the Sisters was that they work even more closely with lay persons in their ministries. The Sisters responded and had opened a Hospital for Crippled Children in Queensland in 1951. The Sisters realised there was also a great need for a hospital for children with mental handicaps, or for those terminally ill. They also began a catechetical program for these children in 1960 called the Little King’s Movement. From its beginning, it was to be handed over totally to lay persons to manage.\textsuperscript{119}

The Marymead Children’s Centre in Canberra, Australia, was another response to Pope John XXIII’s call. This Centre opened in 1966 for the care of children whose carers or parents could not manage or needed assistance for a time. It employed lay persons as carers and administrators of the complex.\textsuperscript{120} These ministries were initiated in accord with the Foundress’ concern for the care and education particularly of women and children.

\textit{Preparations for the Second Vatican Council}

Pope John XXIII had recognised the enormous changes in society that had brought about a paradigm shift in thinking about the Church and the world. He realised the need to take into account this new reality. In his encyclicals prior to the Second Vatican Council, Pope John addressed the whole world, not just Catholics.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Pope John XXIII, quoted in \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 186.
  \item \textsuperscript{118} Cf. Chapter Four, \textit{Helene’s Missionary Spirituality}.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 174.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Cf. Scanlon, \textit{The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Australia and Papua New Guinea}, 287. This Centre has now been handed over to lay management and ownership.
\end{itemize}
For several years prior to the beginning of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, theologians such as Yves Congar, Danielou, Schillebeckx\textsuperscript{121} had been discussing issues which they believed needed to be addressed. Yet as previously noted “…by the time of the proclamation of Vatican II, Religious had already been in a process of change and renewal in response to the needs of the time….”\textsuperscript{122}

Besides the need for the Church to be more open to the world, studies in missiology were being undertaken as a specific discipline within the Catholic Church. New initiatives in the study of missiology were greatly advanced by the work of Divine Word Missionary, Louis J. Luzbetak, who saw the advantages of a broad approach involving a variety of disciplines; for instance, the crucial insights and sound advice gleaned from anthropology for mission.\textsuperscript{123} No longer was it the gospel imperative alone which guided the missionary, but the realisation that the culture and religion of the peoples was of great importance and God-given. The systematic study of cultures using the tools of anthropology opened new doors to the understanding and appreciation of the workings of the Holy Spirit amongst all the world’s peoples, as Luzbetak wrote:

> The active presence of God began on the day of creation. This active presence continues today over the whole world within and without the Church. The Church is therefore missioned not so much to introduce Christ to non-Christians as if he were a total stranger, but rather to help the non-Christian find him already present and active in the non-Christian heart.\textsuperscript{124}

Catholic missiologists were initially reliant upon Protestant theologians for their studies on methods of mission, as noted by missiologist Stephen Bevans, “Catholic scholars depend greatly on the wealth of scholarship of many other Christians…. [for instance] David Bosch, Mercy Odooye, Wilbert Shenk, and Andrew Walls.”\textsuperscript{125} As Luzbetak states: “It was during

\textsuperscript{121} “Fr. Bernard Haring: Stop calling the Pope ‘His Holiness’.” http://www.traditioninaction.org/ProgressivistDoc/A_017_HaringNoHierarchy.htm (accessed 13 December, 2014). These men were periti at the Second Vatican Council, as explained above.


\textsuperscript{123} In the ‘Forward’ to the 1988 edition of Luzbetak’s work, The Church and Cultures. xv.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 73.

this period [nineteenth century] that missiological studies were first recognized as integral and distinct constitutive parts of the wider system of theology.”

Luzbetak’s book on missiology was adopted by the Sisters as one of their primary texts for their studies.

During the nineteenth century competition and confrontation between Catholics and Protestants occurred more often than cooperation… The birth and development of theology took place along parallel lines. During the twentieth century, especially after the independence of the country (1945/1949), we see many similarities, common themes and forms of collaboration.

This antagonism between the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations continued as major mission conferences were organised by Protestant groups for better cooperation with each other. Catholics were not included. It was in 1910 “at Edinburgh, first steps were taken towards an institutionalized cooperation between Protestant mission councils.” International Missionary Conferences expanded over the years and created the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921 and later the World Council of Churches. Again, Catholics showed no interest, yet the Orthodox Church participated:

The historical roots of the World Council of Churches are found in student and lay movements of the 19th century, the 1910 Edinburgh world missionary conference, and a 1920 encyclical from the (Orthodox) Synod of Constantinople suggesting a "fellowship of churches" similar to the League of Nations.

Catholics finally attended as observers at the World Council of Churches gathering at the Fourth Assembly, held in Uppsala in 1968. This opened the Catholic Church to greater involvement with other Christian denominations. The Sisters welcomed this initiative as they had already been cooperating with other denominations, beginning with the Foundress herself.

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126 Luzetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 16.
129 Ibid.
131 Cf. Chapter Three.
Pope John XXIII had a breadth of vision which went beyond only the Catholic Church itself to the world beyond. He was “the first pope to focus detailed attention on issues of world development in his 1961 encyclical, Mater et Magistra.” In his encyclical, Pacem in Terris Pope John XXIII addressed the entire world; after the standard greeting to the Catholic world, the pope added a greeting also to all people of good will. This encyclical “was an appeal to people everywhere, deeply shaken by the near disaster of nuclear war, that peace required dialogue across Cold War boundaries, and practical collaboration through international organisations to promote human wellbeing.” Pope John insisted “that the Church relate much more closely with the world of work and society, and abandon its Counter-Reformation fortifications.”

A theologian of today, Bruce Duncan, expressed the opinion that this encyclical “encapsulated beautifully how intently the Church was committed to promoting peace and human rights, and baptised John’s expansive engagement with the world’s social and political problems.” These two encyclicals reaffirmed the Sisters’ mode of ministry of promoting the wellbeing of everyone regardless of religion or ethnicity. For instance, in 1950 the Sisters opened a school in India for every child, “Brahmins, Hindus, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants. In 1983 there were several thousand students.” In Brazil, the Sisters went to Manaus in 1930 to care for the children of lepers, and later established a convent to assist in the distribution of medicine to the various villages with those who had leprosy as it was now curable. The community expanded to include nursing, teaching, literacy class for the promotion of women, and other pastoral services.

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134 Duncan, “The Peacemaker Pope.”

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 Cf. Chapter Three.

138 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and Its Risks, 272.


140 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and Its Risks, 901, 902.
To facilitate this new approach to peoples of religions other than Catholic, Pope John XXIII established a *Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity* on 5 June 1960 as one of the preparatory commissions for the Council to invite members of other Christian denominations to be observers during the Council. Today this Office is known as the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity.\(^\text{141}\) The Sisters continue involvement in this work through their service at the United Nations and with *Franciscan International*, both ecumenical and interfaith bodies.\(^\text{142}\) They also opened their retreat houses, hosting ecumenical prayer days and attended ecumenical services when possible.\(^\text{143}\)

The Sisters carried out their various ministries according to the Charism handed down to them by their Foundress. This was in accord with the common understanding of missionary life for religious women of that time, although not formally articulated. They cooperated with the bishops and priests on the particular missions, ministering mainly to the women and children of the area. This perception of mission expanded over the years through the Sisters’ own reflection, the ongoing studies of the theology of mission, and their responses to the ‘signs of the times.’ These led to a transformation in their self-understanding as missionaries. From devotional practices and obedience to the Superior, the Sisters themselves were now becoming educated and taking more responsibility for themselves and their mission as encouraged by Pope Pius XII in *Sponsa Christi*. In doing this, the Sisters were guided by their Foundress’ vision of a sound preparation for mission. At the same time adapting their understanding of the vow of obedience according to call at their own General Chapter to take responsibility for themselves and for the Institute.

**Summary**

Following the Foundress’ vision at the time of the foundation of the Institute, the Sisters carried out their ministry based on the common response to the gospel call to “go, make disciples…” (Mt 28:19). This was the Church’s unquestioned *modus operandi* for missionary works. The Sisters, following their Foundress’ example, saw the principal means of doing this through the witness of their lives. They did this in the midst of the various wars and


\(^{142}\) Cf. Chapter Seven, *Collaboration Between Franciscans*.

conflicts which frequently brought them out of their enclosure to tend to the wounded and refugees. Following Helene’s vision, this was seen as fulfilling an important aspect of their missionary vocation.

The reform recommended by Pius XII modifying the requirements of the enclosure allowed the Sisters greater freedom to respond to the needs of peoples.

With the cessation of war, life slowly went back to the pre-war daily routine and enclosure. Yet there were thousands of refugees around them as many had nowhere to live as their houses and townships had been destroyed. The Sisters assisted these people where possible.

A significant impact upon the Sisters’ missiology was the Second Vatican Council, particularly the decisions which addressed religious life. These recommendations allowed the Sisters to adapt to the cultures in which they lived and opened them to recognise the values within other religions. These changes evolved from the missiology of their Foundress, who believed that the Catholic religion was the only true one. The following chapter outlines the changes recommended for religious by the Second Vatican Council which the Sisters welcomed in the spirit of their Foundress.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Second Vatican Council and Its Influence on the Sisters’ Guiding

Missiology

Overview

The Second Vatican Council was a momentous event which resounded throughout the Church, but particularly inspired many religious communities. A number of the Vatican II documents inspired the Sisters to update their lifestyle and expand their ministries. These changes expanded the understanding of the missiology of their foundress.

The upheavals caused by a number of devastating wars during the first half of the twentieth century called for new ministries on a scale not seen previously. These situations called for the Sisters to respond with the creation of new ministries.

This chapter will explore to what extent some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council confirmed the mission that was already being carried out by the Sisters. It will also show to what extent they invited the Sisters to walk in new ways in living out their specific mission.

Relevant Vatican Council Documents on Missiology

The first paragraph of the Vatican Council II Decree, Gaudium et Spes,¹ succinctly states the new openness of the Church to the whole of humanity desired by the Council participants, beyond any religious or cultural boundaries:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ [GS #1].

This statement declared that the Church is not just concerned with its own affairs, but intimately involved in the lives of all peoples. It affirmed the approach that the Sisters were

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already taking in their outreach to everyone regardless of religion, social status or political allegiance. As *Gaudium et Spes* also states: "...with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" [*GS # 29*].

As mentioned previously, feminism was not a term used in Helene’s era, yet she and the Sisters reached out to all people and lived their lives especially as strong advocates for women and children as advocated in *Gaudium et Spes*. They worked tirelessly for their promotion, particularly in the areas of education and health. The Sisters have continued these ministries in their works, taking up the call of the Second Vatican Council in its document, *Perfectae Caritatis*, to return to their roots and re-evaluate their ministries. To do this they were urged at their General Chapter in 1972-73 to study the Vatican II documents which related specifically to missionary work: *Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate and Ad Gentes.*

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**FMMs and the Missiology in Lumen Gentium**

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, was promulgated on 21 November, 1964 and opens with the words: “Christ is the Light of nations....” (#1) It states that every Catholic is “to bring the light of Christ to all...” (#1) Hence, it is a reminder that this duty of proclaiming the Good News is not confined to missionaries belonging to religious Orders or Congregations, but is the obligation of the laity as well, according to their state in life: “...may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church” [#33].

This emphasis on the obligation of every Christian to be involved in the mission *ad extra* of the Church encouraged many Lay Missionary Groups to send some of their members to assist in establishing Catholic communities in various countries. An Australian lay movement, for instance, the Paulian Lay Missions [PALMS] began in 1956 to train people to cooperate “across cultures in order to achieve a just, sustainable, interdependent and peaceful world free

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of poverty...Since 1961 we have prepared qualified and experienced Australians for volunteering..." PALMS now has members serving within Australia and overseas.

The FMM Sisters and other Congregations founded specifically for the ‘missions’ were no longer unique in a commitment to overseas postings, missio ad extra. Yet the Sisters were already working beside lay persons in a variety of new ministries as shown previously. For example, some of the women who had been residents in an orphanage in Senegal run by the Sisters remained at the complex to work with the Sisters.

*Lumen Gentium* called upon the Sisters to evaluate their existing ministries to ensure that they were in line with the Foundress’ vision of encouraging lay persons to continue the works the Sisters had begun where possible. In Australia, for instance, the Sisters initiated the catechetical program, the Little King’s Movement, in 1971. This program arose from the Sisters’ concern for the faith development of the children in the hospital where the Sisters cared for crippled children. The Movement was established by one of the Sisters, with each child having a one-on-one ‘teacher’. From its foundation, the program was organised in such a way as to be handed over totally to lay management. The laity expanded the program to include visits to other facilities and organising camps for the children. This endeavour followed in the footsteps of the Foundress who established multiple programs for the promotion of women.

A further example of the above advice in *Lumen Gentium* is the decision of the Sisters to work for a fuller ‘Indonesianisation’ of the Institute there. This was the adoption of closer contact between the people and the Sisters in Indonesia and the study of the cultures in that country. The Sisters replaced themselves with lay staff where possible. For instance, the Sister in charge of the health services for the Institute on the island of Flores established twenty-two health centres and placed local nurses in charge of them.

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5 Ibid.
6 Cf. below, *Some Responses by non-Missionary Congregations to The New Missionary Outlook*.
7 Cf. Chapter Five, 24: *Cooperation with the Laity*.
8 Cf. Ibid., *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 782.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 7.
Other works such as kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Australia were handed over to lay administration in the 1980s. In a number of the schools, the new Administrators asked the Sisters to continue their involvement through talks and other input on their charism. For example, at the secondary school in Melbourne which was handed over to lay administrators, the school has kept the FMM charism alive by naming their class groups after Franciscan saints and FMM Sisters. The Sisters are invited to speak to the staff and the students on frequent occasions, and to attend all events such as graduations and awards nights. The college commissioned a life-sized statue of Helene which is placed in the garden at the main entrance. The Sisters’ continued involvement in this work by promoting the Franciscan spirituality which was very dear to their Foundress.

*Lumen Gentium* reminded missionaries of the respect due to the local cultures. The earlier manner of carrying out mission was critiqued by an African theologian, Laurenti Magesa, in his advice to Missionary Congregations. Speaking of the need for them to listen to the people in Africa where FMMs were working, he wrote:

…the future of Missionary Institutes on the African continent will depend on how the particular charism of an Institute is broadened and adapted, in various appropriate ways, to include the faithful outside the immediate particular company around the Founder, and "all people of good will" …*Ecclesia semper reformanda*, also applies to the Missionary Institute. Must not the missionaries of the future, unlike previously, take seriously the realization of the divine presence in African Religion?

Another author, Franciscan, Gloria Wirba, when speaking of the situation in Africa, recognised these challenges:

In a culture still imprisoned by certain traditions, taboos and practises which often render, particularly, women and children, victims of enormous pain and suffering, African religious women today seek various ways of proclaiming the Gospel to their people as the Good News, a message of life.

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16 Laurenti Magesa “The Future of International Missionary Institutes in Africa, 81. Magesa has written a further, very helpful book on African incarnational spirituality which can be of great assistance to foreign missionaries in Africa: *What is not Sacred?*
Wirba pointed out the importance of working with African religious women so that they themselves could incarnate the gospel into their own reality.\textsuperscript{18} The Institute is doing this through their own African Sisters in their cooperation between various Congregations.\textsuperscript{19}

The above practices can also be applied to situations in other regions of the world; for instance, in Asia and Latin America among the numerous ministries of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

\textbf{FMMs and the Missiology in Nostra Aetate}

The general understanding of what constituted ‘mission’ in Roman Catholic circles prior to the Second Vatican Council was generally understood as making converts to Catholicism. This has been strongly criticised by certain theologians, including the Jesuit, Aloysius Pieris: “The great medieval heresy of the Roman Church was to believe that the Church was co-extensive with the Reign of God. Vatican II has abandoned this dangerous presupposition.”\textsuperscript{20}

As indicated previously, ‘making converts’ was never the attitude of Helene or the Sisters. Yet Helene still retained her belief that the Catholic Church was the only true one. Interfaith dialogue was a new missionary venture for the Institute.

The Declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religion, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, was promulgated on 28 October, 1965, almost one year after \textit{Lumen Gentium}. It is possible to see a development in the understanding amongst the Council participants of the validity of other faiths. For instance, as noted above in \textit{Lumen Gentium}, the Church was still thinking in terms of missions for conversions. However, within this document, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, the Council participants state very clearly the unity of the whole human race: “One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extends to all people…” [NA #1]. The document continues, pointing out the need for cooperation between the various religions: “...that through dialogue and collaboration

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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{19} Marie Josèphe Labrousse, “Mobile social service at Ouarzazate,” \textit{Meeting Space}, January/February 2011, 26.  \\
\end{flushright}
with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these people” [NA #2).

The Foundress shared this understanding of God’s saving design for the whole of humanity when she wrote of the union of the Trinity with “all souls.”

With regards to encountering people of other faiths, the missiologists Bevans and Schroeder spoke of mission in the following terms:

Mission must first and foremost be done with openness and respect for the other, recognizing that God was present before our arrival, that the Spirit has sown the seeds of the word among all peoples and all cultures, and that we missionaries need to be evangelized by those whom we evangelize.

*Nostra Aetate* encouraged the Sisters to recognise God’s revelation through other religions and the essential goodness in those faiths:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. It regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones it holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all… [#2].

The concept of Interfaith Dialogue was new to the Institute. Helene, although open to other religions, did not consider them to be true religions. The experiences of the Sisters in nations with a religion other than Christianity, led them to study these religions. They came to see that God is at work in the world in mysterious ways, as Bevans stated:

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21 Helene de Chappotin, in *He Speaks to Me in the Heart of His Church*, 13. Cf. also Four, Chapter Mission and Trinity.

From the first instant of creation, then, God has been present through the Spirit, breathing life, stirring up prophecy, bringing about healing and reconciliation. In Jesus, God’s mysterious saving movement in history takes on a human face, and as Risen Lord sends the Spirit into the world not for the first time, but with new focus. Such a proposal of the priority of the Spirit gives, I believe, fresh validity to other religious ways and to Christian commitment in the world.  

The Sisters, almost in anticipation of this Decree, embraced their Foundress’ wholehearted concern for promotion of women and children, especially in the field of education, regardless of religion or ethnicity. For instance, a high school was established in Pakistan in 1946 with the purpose of the education and advancement of women. As this school is in a Muslim country, the majority of its students are Muslim. The school had been nationalised in 1973 for twenty years but was handed back to the Sisters in 1993. In the school, they promote interfaith dialogue through interfaith prayer.

Another example of collaboration with the followers of other religions is the Sisters’ college Stella Maris, in Chennai, India. It was opened in 1947 for the higher education of women. It followed the Foundress’ emphasis on the study of social development:

The College is committed to serving the economically and socially marginalised sections of society and provides university education in a Christian atmosphere for students, especially those belonging to the Catholic community. Admission is open to all, irrespective of caste and creed, and their rights of conscience are respected.

This College offers courses in the traditional Arts and Science and in International Studies, Information Technology, Bioinformatics and Biotechnology. The College accepts a minimum of 10% Dalits, and 50% from the Catholic community. The remaining pupils come from other religious backgrounds, for instance Hindu and Muslim.

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24 Cf. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, [The Sisters call themselves “Sisters of Mary” in Muslim countries as the term ‘missionary’ has overtones of attempting to convert.] School Magazine, “Truth and Charity”.  

25 Ibid.


27 Ibid.
The Sisters’ approach to ministry in these two colleges has been carried out according to the recommendations later articulated in *Nostra Aetate*. The Sisters’ presence in the schools permit them to carry out their mission as they see it according to their Foundress, witnessing to the love of God for everyone without proselytizing.

Fifty years after the proclamation of *Nostra Aetate*, the Jewish Rabbi, Fred Morgan, wrote of its openness. In a certain way, this described what the FMMs were to do now, engage in dialogue. He said:

> NA opens the door to Jews and defends their rights to religious dignity in a way that had not existed within Christian societies hitherto…to engage in dialogue as means of heightening our sense of God’s presence in our lives while creating a world of peace within which each religious community can pursue its distinctive religious goals.²⁸

**FMMs and the Missiology in Ad Gentes**²⁹

The Vatican Council Decree *Ad Gentes* was promulgated on 7 December, 1965, and opened by stating that the Church is called to establish one people, one family in Christ, so that every creature, all things may be restored in Christ, and all… “…may constitute one family in Him and one people of God” [*AG #1*]. This statement articulates the Sisters’ basis for their ministry from their very foundation: that all may be one family and one people in God.³⁰ The Sisters lived this missiological insight even before it had been stated clearly during the Second Vatican Council.

*Ad Gentes* states that the mission of the Church is God’s work: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” [*AG #2*]. This reiterates the understanding of the *Missio Dei* inferred previously by the Foundress.³¹

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³¹ Ibid.
An essential aspect of mission expressed in *Ad Gentes* [#41] - to work for the holistic development of the peoples - was not always seen as the specific role of missionaries. As missiologist Larry Nemer explained:

For centuries missionaries had been concerned about the corporal works of mercy; but these were often seen as pre-evangelization or a means of making converts. However, *Ad Gentes* pointed out, and Paul VI later developed this in *Populorum Progressio*, that missionaries must be concerned about the full development of peoples for the sake of the Kingdom, even when the Gospel cannot be preached.\(^{32}\)

The Sisters were already living this important characteristic of mission. The gospel could not be preached in certain countries such as those governed by Muslims, yet the Sisters fulfilled their founding charism by witnessing to the love of God through their lives of service. They lived and worked in countries such as Egypt, Syria and Turkey, witnessing to Christianity by their concern for the people.\(^{33}\) They recalled their Foundress’ words that often the desire for baptism comes following the Sisters’ witness to the Christian values.\(^{34}\)

*Ad Gentes* echoed the approach to the ministry of service of the Sisters by the witness of their lives: that they prepare the way of the Lord, making Him somehow present [cf. *AG* #6]. This could be achieved, according to the Foundress’ request to her Sisters, when they were on their way to Japan - that they live like the Japanese.\(^{35}\) Later, *Ad Gentes* gave similar advice to all missionaries: “…let them share in the cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions…” [*AG* #11].

As can be seen from the above, the Decree *Ad Gentes* did not bring anything new to the understanding the Sisters had of mission at that time; it simply articulated it more clearly, and confirmed what they had believed and were already carrying out.

Along with their study of the above documents, the Sisters also examined in depth the document on religious life itself, *Perfectae Caritatis*.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{33}\) The Sisters have been present in a number of other Muslim countries since the Foundress’ day.

\(^{34}\) Cf. Chapter Four, in *Mission as Witness and not Proselytism*. Cf also *First Constitutions*, # 114.

\(^{35}\) Helene de Chappotin, in *For the Mission and Its Risks*, 433.

**FMMs and the Vatican Council Document Perfectae Caritatis**

This document, the decree on the adaptation and renewal of Religious Life, called Religious to go to the source of their charism, their founding vision.

The Council document which specifically addressed the manner of life of men and women religious, *Perfectae Caritatis*, [PC] was welcomed by the Sisters. This document stressed the importance of a sound spiritual and professional education of the Sisters:

> It may be taken for granted, however, that so great a task cannot be discharged unless the members be thoroughly trained in matters divine and human so that they are truly a leaven in the world for the strengthening and growth of the body of Christ. Superiors, therefore, should give serious attention especially to the spiritual training to be given members as well as encourage their further formation [PC #11].

As indicated earlier, from their very foundation, the requirement of a solid education has been a priority.37

*Perfectae Caritatis* recommended that Religious open themselves more fully to the peoples and cultures amongst whom they lived, “adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members… [PC #3].”

Whilst addressing the lifestyle of Religious, it affirmed the Sisters in their approach to be close to the peoples amongst whom they lived. The Sisters maintained the Foundress’ desire of ministering through the witness of their lives of service. The final paragraph of *Perfectae Caritatis* reiterates this requirement:

> Let all religious, therefore, rooted in faith and filled with love for God and neighbor, love of the cross and the hope of future glory, spread the good news of Christ throughout the whole world so that their witness may be seen by all and our Father in heaven may be glorified (Matt. 5:16) #25.

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The Sisters also studied the specific paragraphs of *Perfectae Caritatis* which advised all missionary Religious to look at their whole lifestyle to re-examine their everyday activities in the missions:

> The manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances [*PC #3*].

The Sisters took up this call to re-examine their missionary outreach at their subsequent General Chapters in 1966 and 1972-73.  

The recommendations offered regarding religious life in the Vatican II document *Perfectae Caritatis* were later expanded in the 1966 document of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*.

**FMMs and the Apostolic letter, *Ecclesiae Sanctae***

In 1966 Pope Paul VI issued an apostolic letter, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, with the purpose of offering further guidelines for the implementation of certain documents of the Second Vatican Council, including that of *Perfectae Caritatis*. These guidelines were to serve until the New Code of Canon Law could be finalised.

Some relevant additions in *Ecclesiae Sanctae* to the suggestions made in *Perfectae Caritatis* that were welcomed by the Sisters are as follows:

- The various aspects (e.g., theological, historical, canonical) of the doctrine of the religious life should be investigated and explained [*ES #16:2*].
- As far as the religious condition is concerned, care should be taken lest more attention be given to exterior forms (such as gestures, dress, the arts, etc.) than to the religious dispositions of the peoples... [*ES #18:2*].

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38 See below, *Embracing the Changes from Vatican II: The Sisters’ General Chapter of 1966, and General Chapter 1972-73*.
39 Paul VI, Apostolic Letter Implementing...Decrees of Vatican Council II *Ecclesiae Sanctae.*
40 Cf. Ibid. *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, Introduction: “...we command that they be observed by way of experiment, that is until the new Code of Canon Law is promulgated.”.
Taking the above suggestions into consideration, studies in scripture and missiology, as recommended in the Sisters’ first General Chapter in 1966 following the Second Vatican Council, were again strongly advocated: “Great importance was given...regarding the formation of religious – theological, biblical, liturgical, apostolic and professional.”\textsuperscript{41} The study of these subjects was already part of the initial formation program of the Sisters, but re-emphasised at their General Chapter: “It is absolutely necessary for future missionaries to study missiology...this is to begin in the Novitiate.”\textsuperscript{42} These recommendations were in accord with their Foundress’ aim of having the Sisters adequately educated, both spiritually and professionally.

Changes in ‘gestures, dress, the arts’ as recommended in \textit{Ecclesiae Sanctae} [#18.2] and as a result of Vatican II, were slowly taken up by the Sisters. The Sisters returned to the use of their baptismal name as recognition of the importance of that Sacrament... “in view of the basic Christian baptismal commitment at the core of the religious vocation.”\textsuperscript{43} Reverting to one’s Baptismal name also gave proper recognition to the Sisters’ gender, as many Sisters had been given the names of male saints. The use of the title ‘Sister’ for all Sisters, removing the title ‘Mother’, was a reminder to them that they are all equal members of the Institute and sisters to each other.

The modification of the habit to a simple dress and/or veil, according to the Sisters’ preferences in whichever Province they were, was a welcome move by many of the Sisters. The simplification of their habit, and in some cases the use of the manner of dress of the people, removed the strangeness of the figure of the ‘nun.’ The European style of the habit had unwittingly aligned the Sisters with the foreigners and colonisers, and thus everything that was ‘imported’ was called into question during the struggles for independence of various nations, as the Sisters at the time commented: “Even Christianity appears to be an ‘import’ because of the nationalities of its first messengers.”\textsuperscript{44} They added: “In reality it was time to assume their own personality and, at the same time, to be completely themselves and in

\textsuperscript{41} Report from the Special General Chapter of 1966, in \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 195.
\textsuperscript{42} General Chapter document of 1966, #37, #38.
\textsuperscript{43} MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope} 330.
\textsuperscript{44} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 179.
solidarity with others…”45 The Sisters’ foundress, Helene, wished them to adapt themselves when possible to their surroundings, as mentioned earlier.46

**Mixed Reactions to Proposed Changes of Ecclesiae Sanctae**

Not all the Sisters welcomed the changes to religious life recommended at the Second Vatican Council and those by Pope Paul VI in *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. The Superior General in 1966, Mother Sainte Agnes, wrote: “The Institute had its large share of enthusiasm, renewal and upheaval in the wake of the Council…some [of the Sisters] criticised the slowness of the adaptations; others protested against abandoning traditions.”47

Religious women had already been influenced by the changes in the society in general which had made advances in the study of the understanding of the human person. Mary Luke Tobin, an auditor at the Second Vatican Council, highlighted some of these:

> Recent psychological, sociological and philosophical insights…led to an emphasis on the priority of persons over institutions, the value of each person's full participation in decisions affecting her and, flowing from this, each person's responsibility to seek justice in the world.48

The above statement reflects the Sisters’ responses as seen in their 1966 General Chapter documents. The Sisters were encouraged to take personal responsibility for themselves as well as for the entire Institute.49 The Minister General of the Franciscan Friars at the time, Constantin Koser, commented on the new way of religious life saying, “...it was no longer a question of feeling at home in a shell, but of having a solid backbone.”50 The Sisters were encouraged to go out to meet the people where they were, leaving behind any need for security.

Speaking about the general reaction of religious women in Australia to the Second Vatican Council, particularly to the document *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Superior General of the

45 Ibid.
46 Cf. above in *Missiology in Ad Gentes*, “to live as a Japanese”.
47 Ibid., 197.
49 Cf. 1966 General Chapter Documents.
Australian Josephite Sisters, Mary Cresp, voiced the excitement of many religious women, including a significant number of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary:

Hardly had documents been issued than they were devoured and discussed in community groups and workshops... The world of Religious, especially women Religious, was ripe for Vatican II... New methods in catechetical instruction were also being promulgated, requiring theological studies. So by the time of the proclamation of Vatican II, Religious had already been in a process of change and renewal in response to the needs of the time... The phenomenon of Religious Life is also a response to the Spirit...51

The Council reaffirmed that the way of life of religious women is their response to the call of the Holy Spirit. Yet despite the changes resulting from the decisions of the Council to make the way of life of religious more meaningful, many Sisters continued to leave their Congregations. As Sandra Schneiders noted the reasons for entering in the first place had changed: “Financial security, freedom from responsibility within the authority structure of a total institution, and escape from sexual issues in a monosexual community disappeared within a few years…52

Earlier, in 1954, Pius XII had written of women who chose not to marry “because of exaggerated self-interest, or because...they shun the burdens of marriage or because like Pharisees they proudly flaunt their physical integrity....”53 The Pope went on, adding that rather, the religious women “dedicate their lives to the service of the poor and the sick, without making any distinction as to race, social rank, or religion...” [#43]. These words of the Pope reflect the words of Helene in the First Constitutions [#115].

The Superior General of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary expressed her sadness in January, 1966, at the losses within her Institute: “We are in the hands of God...As regards defections, we are not exempt from the general crisis....”54 Some reasons for the exodus from religious life were given by theologian Sandra Schneiders. These reflected the experience of many of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary who were leaving:

51 Mary Cresp, RSJ “Religious life and its evolution since Vatican I.”
53 Pius XII, Encyclical, Sacra Virginitas.
54 Marie Sainte Agnes, FMM, to the 1966 Chapter members, reprinted in For the Mission and Its Risks, 199.
...because they could now do what they had originally entered Religious Life to do -- namely, become holy and minister in the Church -- without the burdens of the superstructure of Religious Life... And at the same time the choices of Religious themselves to de-emphasize exotic dress, secret dwellings, and medieval practices helped dissipate the fascinating mysteriousness of their lives.\textsuperscript{55}

Schneiders added:

As many left and few entered, religious who stayed got in touch in a new way with the real meaning of religious vocation, the naked God-quest at the center of their hearts... Those who continued to choose religious life had now to choose it in purified faith because it was largely devoid of compensatory packaging.\textsuperscript{56}

The number of women leaving the Institute left several communities emotionally upset as they saw friends and colleagues depart.\textsuperscript{57} The departure of many FMM Sisters also left the communities vulnerable as there were not enough members to maintain the various ministries.\textsuperscript{58}

Besides the numbers of women leaving, those Sisters who remained were ageing. This situation was faced by the FMMs as well. Yet the call to religious life comes from God, as Schneiders reminded the Sisters:

No Congregation ‘needs’ more members than are actually called to it by God. The purpose of the life is not to perpetuate particular Congregations nor to staff Church institutions; it is to live intensely the witness to the Gospel to which the Congregation is called and for as long as it is so called.\textsuperscript{59}

These withdrawals led to the Sisters re-assessing their way of life and their criteria for accepting women into the Institute. The Sisters adopted this call of the Document \textit{Perfectae Caritatis} that stated that “candidates should neither present themselves for, nor be admitted to the vow of chastity, unless they have been previously tested sufficiently and have been shown to possess the required psychological and emotional maturity” [\textit{PC} #12]. The women who wished to enter the Institute would now be required to have psychological assessment of

\textsuperscript{55} Sandra Schneiders, “The Ongoing Challenge of Renewal in Contemporary Religious Life”


\textsuperscript{57} In Australia, many of the women who left the Institute have remained in touch with the Sisters.

\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Superior General in 1966, in \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 196.

their suitability for this way of life. This was very necessary for this Institute as it required mature women who would be able to live and minister in other countries and amidst other cultures and religions. These requirements were later reiterated in the 1983 Code of Canon Law: “In regard to the discernment of vocations the new Code of Canon Law puts the accent on health, suitable character and sufficient qualities of maturity to embrace the particular life of the Institute” (c.642).60

Yet, despite the numbers leaving the Institute, women continued to join although in smaller numbers. In 1966 the number of Franciscan Missionaries of Mary worldwide was at its peak at 11,600 Sisters.61 By 2005 there were 7,286 Sisters. Asian Sisters were now in the majority at 43%, with European Sisters 29% and African Sisters making up 15% of the total number of Sisters.62 Yet it was not until 1996 that the first non-Western Sister, a Syrian, Christiane Mégarbané, was elected as Superior General.63

Some Responses by Non-Missionary Congregations to The New Missionary Outlook

With the emphasis on the responsibility of all Catholics for the mission of the Church, many Congregations began to establish foundations in other countries as ‘missions.’ The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, an Australian Congregation, established communities outside of Australia, for instance, in Papua New Guinea and Peru. However, these Sisters were all Australians.64 The Australian Sisters of Charity opened a hospital in Pakistan in the 1982. All of these Sisters were also Australians.65 Many dioceses also sent missionaries to other countries, yet most of those sent were of the same nationality, for example, those religious who went from the United States of America to Latin American countries.66 In contrast with this style of doing mission, the FMM Sisters retained their specific charism of having communities of various nationalities and living internationally, as their Foundress had required.

61 Cf. For the Mission and Its Risks, 198.
63 Christiane Mégarbané, FMM, was Superior General from 1996 to 2008.
Almost ten years after the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI issued a document on the mission of the Church *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. This document was of great assistance to the Sisters.

**FMMs and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi***

As some of the members of the 1974 Synod of Bishops questioned whether working for justice and liberation was a genuine method of evangelisation, the Pope of the day, Paul VI, issued a document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi [EN]* to clarify the position of the Church:

The assembly was charged with clarifying the church's evangelizing identity in a way that did justice both to traditional theology and to the liberationist construction of mission and evangelization. Unable to arrive at a synthetic position and publish a document, it handed the results of its deliberations to Paul VI for his elaboration and study.

Raymond Rossignol, writing on the role of missionary institutes, pointed out that the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, does not mention missionary institutes. He indicated that previous documents have made several references to them, particularly in *Ad Gentes* and *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. However, the Encyclical is addressed to the usual recipients: “Episcopate, to the Clergy…” but then expands to include: “to All the Faithful of the Entire World.” This emphasised again the role of the whole Catholic community in their duty to participate in the work of evangelisation according to their unique situation.

The Pope stressed the intimate relationship between the call of the gospel to follow Jesus and involvement in enhancing the lives of the people:

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69 Burrows, Ibid.
Yet, one can never sufficiently stress the fact that evangelization does not consist only of the preaching and teaching of a doctrine. For evangelization must touch life: the natural life to which it gives a new meaning, thanks to the evangelical perspectives that it reveals; and the supernatural life, which is not the negation but the purification and elevation of the natural life [EN #47].

This imperative for the holistic approach to mission is clear in the gospel according to Matthew: to feed the hungry, visit the prisoners... (Cf. Mt 25:1-7:27). The Encyclical repeated that evangelization would be incomplete if it did not take into account the interaction between the Gospel and a person’s entire life [Cf. EN #29].

Pope Paul continued: “How in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of humankind?” [EN #31]. The pope answered his own question, saying: “…liberation is incomplete if it neglects to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ” [EN #34]. This statement reaffirmed the Sisters’ involvement in works for justice and peace from their very foundation, as was practised by their Foundress.

The advice contained in Evangelii Nuntiandi, even though not directly addressed to missionary institutes, was taken up enthusiastically by the Sisters, as it affirmed their ministries amongst peoples of other religions and the manner of their approach. The Superior General, Alma Dufault, at their General Chapter in 1972, challenged the Sisters to deepen even further their commitment to their missionary dynamism by asking themselves the following questions:

* In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on one’s conscience?
* To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of this century?
* What methods should be followed in order that the power of the Gospel may have its effect?72

The Sisters in each Province were encouraged to answer the above questions, in the light of their own context. Many of the Sisters are still involved in evangelization among the people described in Evangelii Nuntiandi, “…believers needing support for their faith, de-christianized peoples and non-practising Christians” [EN #56]. This reiterates the direction of

the Institute from its beginning and which was repeated in the Sisters’ 1972 Chapter Document: “We are sent first to all of those among whom Christ has not been revealed, to those among whom the Church is least present, and to those who are poorest, for whom we have a special love.” In this way the Sisters have remained faithful to their Foundress’ vision. 

Evangelii Nuntiandi explained how the common good can be sought - by participating together in the search:

…through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these people [EN #2].

In 1977 the then Superior General, Alma Dufault, wrote to the Sisters reiterating the importance of the ministry for justice as outlined in Evangelii Nuntiandi: “This missionary mandate is widening its scope more and more in many countries, confronting us with questions of justice, human rights and inculturation which demand reflection and discernment…”

The Sisters were encouraged to study this document in depth. In 1978 the Superior General, Alma Dufault, reiterated the missionary vocation that was expressed in Evangelii Nuntiandi, pointing out that this document “has served to reaffirm the missionary vocation and its place in the Church…”

Thus, the document Evangelii Nuntiandi confirmed the Sisters’ missionary methodology, and encouraged them to continue in their efforts for mission according to the Charism handed down to them by their Foundress.

As explained previously, the importance of context has been repeatedly emphasised. Evangelii Nuntiandi reminded the Sisters of the need to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their ministries. At the Sisters’ General Chapter of 1978, the Superior General indicated that Evangelii Nuntiandi “provides us with the needed criteria to evaluate the priorities that have in fact been accorded in our overall mission planning these six years.” Most of these

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73 1972-73 General Chapter Document, #13, and First Constitutions, #108.
74 In her letter to the Sisters of 7 June, 1977, in For the Mission and Its Risks, 234.
76 Alma Dufault, “In the Dynamism of Love,” in her report to the General Chapter 1978, 151.
priorities are addressed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, thus reaffirming the decisions taken by the Sisters at their previous General Chapter in 1972-73; for instance,

- To reveal Jesus and his Gospel to those who do not know them [cf. *EN* #51];
- To work for liberation and justice [cf. *EN* #30, #31];
- To "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation" Mk 16:15 [cf. *EN* #49];
- To strive for unity through Ecumenism [cf. *EN* #77].

The above recommendations in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, particularly those advocating works for justice and peace, were taken up by the Sisters, particularly in the light of the Liberation Theology expounded in Latin America and other continents. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is acknowledged as ground-breaking when considering the missionary outreach to Latin America after the Second Vatican Council. One author explained:

> Latin American missiology had its roots not in theological faculties, as in Europe, but in the grassroots challenges of the indigenous apostolate. It was not so much the missionary orientations of the council itself as the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) of Pope Paul VI that directly moved the Latin American bishops and theologians in general to take seriously the relation between Gospel and culture.\(^78\)

**Embracing the Changes from Vatican II: The Sisters’ General Chapter of 1966**

For this General Chapter of 1966, the first gathering following the Second Vatican Council, the Sisters’ General Councillors decided on a consultation of all fully professed Sisters. Previously, apart from the first General Chapter of the Institute in 1877, only delegates to a General Chapter were consulted and had voting rights.\(^79\)

> Each one must answer before God, adding freely what she wishes to see modified in our customs and usages...so that our spiritual life may be intensified, and we may better respond to what the Church expects from us.\(^80\)

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\(^77\) Cf. 1972 *General Chapter* Document.


\(^79\) One or two Sisters are elected by the community to attend the Chapter according to the size of their Province.

All subsequent General Chapters would now include the participation of each Sister through pre-Chapter discussions and consultations to ascertain where the Spirit is leading the Institute at a particular time.

Out of this 1966 consultation, greater importance was given to the responsibility of each Sister to continue her own formation, “theological, biblical, liturgical, apostolic and professional.” The Sisters were also encouraged to study the new technological means of communication as this was yet another avenue for mission. In Australia for instance, a number of Sisters studied radio programming and journalism.

At this 1966 Chapter the delegates established commissions in preparation for the following General Chapter in 1972 which would begin the process of revision of their Constitutions. There were meetings on various levels - local and provincial – in accord with the decision of the 1966 Chapter, which encouraged “a constant and progressive exercise in co-responsibility.”

The changes in religious life suggested in the Vatican II document, Perfectae Caritatis, were slowly taken up by the Sisters. The Sisters’ retreat houses were opened to ecumenical activities as well as the usual retreats and conferences for Catholics. The participation in ecumenical dialogue was a major change from Helene’s belief that Protestants, Jews and Freemasons were the principle enemies of the Catholic Church.

In Australia, which had five retreat houses in the 1970s, Anglicans were welcomed to hold their prayer meetings in these retreat centres beginning in 1966. Ecumenical prayer services were held at those same centres, and the buildings were also opened to peoples of other faiths. Retreat work, a ministry very dear to the Foundress, was continued as part of living the charism.

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81 Ibid., 195.
82 Cf. Ad Gentes, #26.
84 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, For the Mission and its Risks, 197.
A major influence on the situations in the mission areas was the new possibility of home visits.\textsuperscript{87} Previously Sisters went to a mission country and usually remained there until their death. Now the importance of maintaining contact with one’s own family and culture as important for one’s psychological health was recognised. This was especially important for the Sisters living in a totally different culture from their own. This decision affected the Sisters’ plans for carrying out their mission for it entailed either replacing the Sister going on home leave or the other personnel doubling the amount of ministry they were responsible for during her time away from the mission. This often demanded a greater flexibility on the part of the Sisters in their manner of carrying out their ministries.

At this General Chapter of 1966 the Sisters were urged to open themselves more fully to lay involvement in the local Churches where they ministered. They were encouraged to collaborate particularly with the indigenous religious of the various mission areas. For example, the Sisters in Papua New Guinea gradually handed over their ministries to local Congregations.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{The Sisters’ General Chapter of 1972-1973}

The General Chapter of 1972-1973 lasted for five months for it had the mandate to update the Sisters’ Constitutions in light of the Second Vatican Council documents. The new wording of the Documents of the Second Vatican Council was exhortative rather than the previously dogmatic style: “A whole new vocabulary developed: charisma, participation, partnership, dialogue, cooperation, friendship. The old language determined and imposed. The new language suggests and invites.”\textsuperscript{89} The Sisters followed this style of terminology in writing their documents. Rather than writing only rules and regulations to ensure conformity to a certain way of life, the new format of their Constitutions reflected a more spiritual and personal approach. The Sisters then used the style of language which encouraged cooperation, collaboration and stressed the personal responsibility of each Sister, whilst allowing for local adaptation.

\textsuperscript{87} Decisions of the 1966 General Chapter, in \textit{For the Mission and its Risks}, 194.
The revised Constitutions were formatted with the spirituality of the Constitutions relating to each subject at the beginning of each chapter. It contained quotations from their Foundress so as to retain the still-valid aspects of the First Constitutions, whilst adapting to the signs of the times. For each Chapter was followed by ‘Norms’ at the end of each section which contained the guidelines for implementing that particular chapter. This left the Sisters of each Province free to adapt the type of the apostolate according to their particular context, with the approval of the Superior General and her Council.90

Community life was one aspect which was modified according to need. Previously a community consisted of at least six Sisters but, where it is seen as important or necessary, a Sister could now live alone or with Sisters of another Congregation: “A precise apostolic need may occasionally lead to the sending of a Sister for an individual mission.”91 This opened the Sisters to the risk of losing their sense of unity which was so dear to their Foundress. Yet this did not take away from the importance of community living which has remained a central value of the Institute. The revised Constitutions were approved and forwarded to the Sisters in 1984.

The Provinces were also encouraged to study their own particular situation in order to respond appropriately, looking at the specific context of their missionary situation:

God challenges us through the signs of the times, this is why we are attentive to the needs of a changing world and to the requests and needs of both the universal and the particular Church, so that we may respond to them in accordance with our charism.92

Some of the priorities which were decided upon at the General Chapter in 1972-73 and which influenced the missiology of the Sisters were:

- To know not only the language, but also the culture, socio-economic, political and religious milieu of their situation.
- To be aware of the need for an adequate education for contact and dialogue with atheist and marxist groups and with non-Christians, knowing the great religions and their sacred books.
- To study missiology, and this to begin in the novitiate.

91 Constitutions of 1984, # 12.
92 Constitutions of 1984, # 37.
• To establish contacts and dialogue in mutual esteem, without proselytizing, in a humble simplicity characterized by respect.
• To be aware of Ecumenism and to take part in meetings for prayer and reflection.
• To go to groups which are not reached by other missionaries.
• To collaborate with international or national organizations, whether private, or other.
• To utilize sociological studies done in the respective countries to help in determining priorities for their lifestyle and ministry.\textsuperscript{93}

As can be seen from the above, many of these options were recapitulations of previous General Chapter decisions, but others have been added to the original Charism handed down from the Foundress. For instance, the importance of knowledge of the local language is retained and the recommendation to go preferably to where Christ is not known, and to the poorest. However, the need for a comprehensive knowledge of the religious and social milieu in which one is ministering is now seen as equally necessary.\textsuperscript{94}

Another recommendation from their General Chapter that the Sisters was to take seriously was the necessity for education in other religions. This was a new initiative which was added to the original Charism of their Foundress, and it was vital in order to be able to dialogue sincerely on an interfaith level. Courses in mission studies were undertaken by the Sisters in various countries; for instance, in Australia at the Pacific Mission Institute, a residential program run by the Columban missionaries, preparing Church personnel for cross-cultural mission,\textsuperscript{95} and the Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne, Australia. This College has dedicated missiological units for the formation of missionary personnel.\textsuperscript{96} The requirement to be adequately educated in mission subjects was in accord with the Sisters’ expanded understanding of their mission - to dialogue and collaborate with persons of other religions for the common good, whilst at the same time ensuring their Foundress’ preference for the poor and for women.

\textsuperscript{94} Cf. “The Plan”, and First Constitutions.
\textsuperscript{96} The Yarra Theological Union is still functioning. Cf. www.ytu.edu.au.
The FMMs and Liberation Theology

The issues of Justice and the ‘Preferential option for the poor’ were basic to the Theology of Liberation. This theology was first formulated at a meeting of Latin American theologians, spearheaded by the theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1964. The research carried out prior to the gathering confirmed that poverty and its consequences prevented the majority of citizens in these countries from living lives of dignity and prosperity, and from participating fully in the political life of the nations. The documents published following the Bishops’ meetings at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) were studied by the Sisters to incorporate the decisions into their ministries. At their 1972 General Chapter the Sisters reflected on the documents from the Medellin Conference. They expressed their desire for a closer solidarity with the poor and those with whom they lived and worked:

We share the concerns of our brothers and sisters, their desires for development, dignity, liberty, justice and peace; with them we commit ourselves to search for discovery within these aspirations that all may become artisans of their own liberation. In solidarity with all people, the mission dynamic involves us in the building of this world that it may be more just and more human and transformed in Christ.

In 1981 the Superior General, Alma Dufault, wrote to the Sisters regarding the Latin American Bishops’ document following their gathering in Puebla in 1979:

…we must be inserted more among the people and have a preferential option for the poor, be committed to pastoral work in and with the local Church for the cause of justice, collaborating with the laity, awakening leaders among them; learn to make a critical analysis of the realities and discern Christian attitudes; be open to universal mission…

The Liberation Theology of Latin America spearheaded similar theologies in other nations; e.g., in Asia and Africa. It also was expressed in terms of the concerns about women, frequently referred to as Feminist theology. The Sisters took up the study of these theologies

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98 Cf. Ibid.
101 1972-73 General Chapter Documents, 28.
continuing the recommendation of their Foundress to be well-educated. The Sisters’ overall ministry was subsequently taken up under the prophetic roles of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.\textsuperscript{103}

Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the official teaching of the Catholic Church has supported this concern of the missionaries for the evangelization of each human group, taking account of each one’s specific cultural identity and religious experience. In their ministry in Latin America, for instance, the Sisters acknowledged the call from the Latin American women themselves to be able to share their own experiences of their faith: “Our task exists because of the vital need for a coherent formulation of our own faith experience based on our mestiza condition and as we face an oppressive reality that we seek to overcome…”\textsuperscript{104} The Sisters worked closely with others, training lay persons to minister to their own peoples, using their own languages. In this way the Sisters helped to maintain the local languages of the areas following the example given them by their Foundress.\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{The Ministry of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation:}
\textbf{The Prophetic Ministry of the Sisters}

In 1982 the Superior General, Alma Dufault, reminded the Sisters of the prophetic aspect of the Charism of the Institute; that it is “… a life of contemplation, a life given for the poor of this world, a life of service dedicated to the universal mission of the Church.”\textsuperscript{106}

The call to live their prophetic dialogue was continued at the Sisters’ 1984 General Chapter. The theme of the Chapter was: “Our mission as FMM today and tomorrow: How can we, as an evangelizing community, give a prophetic response to the cry of the poor and the challenges of today’s world?” The Delegates to the Chapter answered this question as follows:

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Just, Peace and the Integrity of Creation} is expanded upon below.


\textsuperscript{105} Cf. \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 907.

\textsuperscript{106} Alma Dufault, in \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 244.
The missionary task always presupposes respect for the freedom of each person in the context of different societies. The Church strives to bring the Gospel Message into all the strata of humanity, so that the world will be transformed from within and made new.  

While the term “Prophetic Dialogue” was not used in Helene’s time, in her life and writings it was very evident. Helene and her Sisters’ efforts on behalf of the poor, especially women and children, enabled them to proclaim the gospel of Love. They fulfilled this by following the method of discernment recommended by Cardinal Cardijn: See, Judge, Act. This method is explained by Cardijn:

“I helped them to see, judge and act by themselves, by undertaking social and cultural action themselves, freely obeying authorities in order to become adult witnesses of Christ and the Gospel, conscious of being responsible for their sisters and brothers in the whole world.”

Benedictine Sister, Joan Chittister, has given a clear definition of a prophet:

The prophet doesn’t foretell the future. The prophet simply says the truth in an environment where the truth is not being heard, is not welcome, is being resisted, and is unacceptable...The prophet is a truth-teller who speaks from the center of the society.

Franciscan Richard Rohr adds: “...a prophet interprets the signs of the times: The prophet is concerned with the world, here and now, in the daily events of the whole human race...” It is recognising the work of the Holy Spirit from the beginning of the universe. Helene frequently referred to the work of the Holy Spirit in the foundation and on-going life of the Institute.

At their Congress in 2015, the participants of the Latin American Women Religious Congress (CLAR) stated that their most important task is to encourage young theologians to take up as
their inheritance the theology of the first generation of Liberation theologians. It is hoped that these theologians will act prophetically and propose a theology which is relevant for their new world of today. The Sisters are members of CLAR and encourage this initiative. The Sisters themselves ensure that their own new members are trained in theology as required by their Foundress before they profess their perpetual vows, concentrating particularly on formation in the Franciscan spirituality.

The delegates at the Sisters’ 2008 General Chapter re-emphasised the essential aspect of their charism, *Franciscan*, as seen in the first priority of the 2008 Chapter decisions: “Our Franciscan Identity Lived Today.” Speaking of Franciscan prayer, they stressed: “This living God is present in our daily life. *A Franciscan way of contemplation* leads us to discover God’s Sacred Presence more fully by opening our eyes and our hearts to our Sisters, to those to whom we are sent, to all creation.” The Sisters maintain their Foundress’ love for and commitment to the Franciscan way of life.

An example of the Franciscan life of promoting peace in the world was St Francis’ desire to go to Muslims during the Fifth Crusade. Franciscan author *Leonhard Lehmann, OFM Capuchin*, stated: “To go to the Saracens is not an exception but rather is part of the form of evangelical Franciscan life.” The Sisters have followed St Francis’ example in their ministry among Muslims.

Following St Francis’ message of peace, the Sisters reaffirmed their commitment to the Franciscan ideals:

> Our work for justice, without violence, can make us artisans of peace, and point to the brotherhood and sisterhood of all persons. To live willingly in positions of minority without any sign of power in our work, our relations and our life-style, being sisters to all, in simplicity and joy, can be a sign of hope in a world of uncertainty and of fear.

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116 2008 General Chapter Decisions, 2.

117 Ibid.


119 Cf. Chapter Seven, “FMMs and the Missiology in *Nostra Aetate,*” and regarding St Francis and the Crusade: Chapter Five, *Other Ministries*.

In order to be more effective in responding to the challenges of the day, the Sisters set up an International Office for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation [JPIC] at their motherhouse in Rome in 1990. A Sri Lankan Sister, Rose Fernando, coordinated this work throughout the Institute. This ensured a network of contacts for the coordination of efforts on behalf of the disadvantaged and disaffected.\footnote{Cf. Alini and Foujols, \textit{An Apostle Sent by God}, 261.} This was possible following their Foundress’ vision of the universal expanse of the Institute.

The issues of justice, peace and care for creation have been the subjects at the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conferences, particularly those held at Medellin, Puebla and Aparacida. In their Conference at Aparacida in 2007, the bishops began by stating the aim of their gathering: “This General Conference has as its theme: ‘Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that our people may be life in Him’ (Jn 14, 6).”\footnote{\textit{“Aparacida 2007. V Conferencia General, Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano,”} (Bogotá, D.C. Colombia, Impression San Pablo, 2007), 2ª edición 2007. Documento Conclusivo. AparacidaEnglish1.pdf. (accessed 27 April, 2013).}

They began by acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit prior to the arrival of Europeans:

\begin{quote}
“The Gospel reached our lands as part of a dramatic and unequal encounter of peoples and cultures. The ‘seeds of the Word,’ [Cf. \textit{Puebla}, 401] present in the native cultures, made it easier for our indigenous brothers and sisters to find in the Gospel life-giving responses to their deepest aspirations: “Christ is the Savior for whom they were silently longing.”\footnote{Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, \textit{“Concluding Document,”} AparacidaEnglish1.pdf (accessed September, 2015).}
\end{quote}

The bishops then explained how they wish to address these issues, calling on the laity to become involved in their rightful role as missionaries:

\begin{quote}
In the light of the risen Lord and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we Bishops of the Americas met in Aparecida, Brazil, to hold the Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. We have done so as pastors who want to continue to advance the evangelizing action of the Church, which is called to make all its members disciples and missionaries of Christ, Way, Truth, and Life, so our peoples may have life in Him.\footnote{\textit{Aparacida}, #1.}
\end{quote}
In their efforts to respond to the call of the Bishops in Latin America, and to alleviate poverty and its causes, the Sisters continued their cooperation with the Church there. They did this in accord with their Foundress’ deep concern for the poor and marginalised.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Because of the situations of violence throughout the world, the Sisters were intimately involved in the ministry of Reconciliation between warring groups.

The value of the Sisters to be involved in reconciliation was emphasised in the post-Vatican II period as an important aspect of their work for peace:

Reconciliation...is at the heart of the Gospel and of mission according to Francis. It is a priority especially in situations of interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and also where there are deep divisions, e.g., xenophobia, terrorism, fundamentalism, etc. Our international/intercultural communities, decided by Mary of the Passion from the beginning, are called to be committed to this way of reconciliation.125

A study by the United Nations on the effect of wars and other violence on women and children particularly has been carried out showing the adverse outcomes of discrimination:

- Access to education and health care reduced
- Increased risk of predatory and contagious diseases in refugee habitations and camps
- Specific evidence of increased suicides amongst traumatized women of childbearing ages.126

The findings of this study reaffirmed the Sisters’ ministry, particularly to women and children, following their Foundress’ vision.

FMM Missionary Spirituality following the Second Vatican Council

Following the Foundress’ emphasis on a having a solid spiritual foundation, the Sisters began to use a multitude of sources that had become available to them. Thus, they availed themselves

125 1972-73 General Chapter Document, C5, 34.
of the numerous volumes of the writings and the biographies of St Francis of Assisi. These books had been collated by the Franciscan Friars into one volume during the 1970s, titled the *Omnibus*, for the benefit of the whole Franciscan family. Having access to the writings of St Francis greatly enhanced the Sisters’ study of his life and his spirituality. The *Omnibus* was followed in 1999 with a three-volume work of the life and writings of St Francis.

The writings of the Foundress, including her personal retreat and spiritual notes, were also printed during the 1970s and therefore made available to all the Sisters. These books were: *He Speaks to Me in the Heart of His Church* (1970), *Memoirs of Mother Mary of the Passion* (1971) and *Where are You Leading Me?* (1972). These books gave the Sisters a deeper insight into the spirit of Helene, and at the same time, revealed to some degree the profound suffering she experienced in establishing the Institute.

The Sisters were involved in the revision of the *Rule of the Third Order Regular of St Francis* in 1976. One of the Sisters, Louise Dendooven, was the coordinator of the International Franciscan Commission established for the revision of the Rule. This endeavour brought together 430 Third Order religious institutes. The work led to greater cooperation between the various Franciscan groups and established a permanent international group. This group was a source of animation for all Third Order Franciscans all over the world. This service to the Franciscan Third Order members continues today and reflects the Foundress’ great love for the Franciscan way of life.

Following the example of Helene, the Sisters attended retreats and spiritual talks given by priests and religious from both the Franciscan and other Orders. The Sisters attended retreats given by, for example, the Divine Word Missionaries at their centre at Nemi, outside of Rome, and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and the Redemptorists in Australia. Sisters attended renewal programs such as those offered by the Josephite Sisters in Australia and New Zealand, and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the USA. These centres opened the Sisters to experiences of other spiritualities.

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130 Redemptorist retreat centres in Perth, Western Australia, and Galong in NSW.
In 1982 the Superior General, Alma Dufault, wrote to the Sisters reminding them again of the need for a sound foundation in spirituality following the Foundress’ guidance:

A solid spiritual foundation in the early years of religious life, and an affirming of it in the succeeding years is very much needed. This formation, basically necessary for us religious, must serve as a means of truly experiencing God in our lives, and not just accumulating religious studies, sessions, seminars, etc.\textsuperscript{132}

\textit{Ministry Cooperation Between Religious Congregations}

Helene had assisted other Congregations in their foundations, yet cooperation within ministries between Congregations was a relatively new initiative. A very important initiative during the Second Vatican Council was the expansion of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG)\textsuperscript{133} in 1965, the day before the closing of the Council. This organisation which began during the pontificate of Pius XII, was now given new impetus, as religious men and women increasingly cooperated in ministries rather than each Congregation or Order having its own individual ministry. The Sisters, as indicated above, initiated a Special General Chapter in 1966 to begin their response to the Vatican Council recommendations.

Due to the possibility to work more closely with others, the Sisters were able to respond in new ways as doors were opened to a variety of new ministries. Between 1966 and 1972, the Sisters worked with other Congregations responding “to urgent appeals for temporary aid, to the refugees of Biafra, to those in Bangladesh, to the disaster victims in Peru, to the wounded in Jordan.”\textsuperscript{134} The Sisters did these services, taking into account the situation of their insertions in various countries, especially following the encouragement of Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical of 1951 on the promotion of missions.\textsuperscript{135}

The Sisters continued their collaboration with the International and National Unions of Major Superiors and other religious Orders, especially missionary congregations, and even expanded this connection, with the Superior General now attending the meetings of this group.\textsuperscript{136} They

\textsuperscript{134} Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 202.
\textsuperscript{135} Pius XII, in his Encyclical \textit{Evangelii Praecones} (on Promotion of Catholic Missions). Cf. Chapter Six, \textit{Changes to Religious Life Proposed by Pope Pius XII}.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Actes du Capitre General Special, Ma au 1or Juillet 1966}, Introduction.
participated with Sisters of other Congregations in programs such as combined novitiate and further educational courses. Helene had been intent on training the Sisters spiritually and professionally, and now the Sisters continued this impetus of their Foundress.

The Sisters’ presence in many nations facilitates their ministry in the Anti-Trafficking of Persons in association with the Major Superiors’ organisation, UISG. In 1995 in the Kinshasa-Congo, for instance, religious women of numerous Congregations gathered to celebrate together:

To celebrate the Week of the Consecrated Life, the men and women religious of Kinshasa met with the “little ones” to pray with them and also to share material goods. For that they planned to meet in the orphanages, the central prison, in the hospitals etc. One of the meeting places was our ‘Blessed Mary of the Passion Home’.

In 2003 the Sisters went to Kabul, Afghanistan, as part of a combined group of Religious women of various Congregations to care for the victims of the war there. They also joined with the Jesuit Refugee Service in their Project for the Support of Refugees of Sudan and Liberia in 2004. The Sisters were also part of Unions of Major Superiors’ initiative in Southern Sudan in 2006/2007 which included a “school for the formation of teachers, a centre of formation for health with a hospital, and help at the level of pastoral work.” These services were an expansion of the Sisters’ original charism for they had previously worked mainly in ministries with their own Sisters.

In Australia, the Sisters work closely with other religious and laity in anti-trafficking endeavours. Janine Bliss, FMM is a representative of the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) and works closely with other FMM Sisters worldwide. Janine promotes the work of ACRATH in schools and other venues, and liaises with local and international organisations which are involved in countering trafficking.

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137 For instance, combined novitiates in Australia at Xavier Institute, Sydney.
140 Malgorzata Sieluzycka FMM stayed in Kabul until 2008 when she was transferred to another mission. Cf. Links, N° 28, January 2008.
141 Cf. Link Nos. 17, 20, 28.
Collaboration Between Franciscans

Besides working with other religious Congregations, the Franciscan family has formed its own organisation, *Franciscans International*, in 1982:

Franciscans International (FI) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) working for the promotion, protection, and respect of human and environmental rights. To combat and curb human rights abuses... The Franciscan Family is composed of approximately 750,000 Franciscans who put into practice the principles of St Francis of Assisi. Franciscans include religious (brothers and sisters) and lay people (the majority) who are committed to justice and peace.\(^\text{143}\)

*Franciscans International* works on behalf of the poor for peace, justice and the care of creation at the United Nations offices in New York and Geneva. It was “a new effort by the Franciscan family...the first step on the journey of the members of the Franciscan family with the United Nations.”\(^\text{144}\) It is the first common ministry of the Franciscan family - religious, lay sisters and brothers, Catholic Anglican and Lutheran - actively choosing to work together. This organisation was the result of a desire to co-ordinate the works of the various Franciscan communities and is a Franciscan presence at the United Nations. Following the example of St Francis of Assisi in his efforts at peaceful dialogue, the Sisters continue this pattern that he gave. The Sisters also followed the aim of Helene in working for people without a voice, especially the poor, as Theresa Plante FMM, explains:

The United Nations community challenges Franciscans to be not only critical but prophetic, to confront the control and exploitation of peoples and the destruction of the earth’s resources. It is also an opportunity to speak out as a Franciscan and be a witness and a prophetic voice on a different level in our society, calling for just and loving relations among nations.\(^\text{145}\)

Odile Coirier FMM, who works for *Franciscans International*, reflected on the Sisters’ membership and work with the United Nations:


\(^\text{144}\) Mary Theresa Plante, FMM, in “Franciscans at the United Nations”, page 22 of a publication for Vocations.

\(^\text{145}\) Ibid.
Twenty years ago…there were only four or five nuns at the United Nations, and they worked independently of one another. Today, there are about 45 religious NGO representatives, according to the group Religious at the U.N.\textsuperscript{146}

Sr Theresa continued, explaining that the engagement with the United Nations also allows for working with and for peoples of all faiths:

As Franciscans at the UN, we are seen as religious people with no hidden agendas, looking out for the good of people everywhere...We not only work within our own congregations…but we now work also in collaboration with other groups whether Christian or not...\textsuperscript{147}

The Franciscan spirituality remained a priority for the Institute, as the Superior General, Alma Dufault, wrote in 1982 that the manner of life of the Sisters points to Gospel values, and thus can be a witness to the presence of Christ.\textsuperscript{148} Often, in certain countries, it is not possible to speak of Christianity. Therefore, the manner of missionary outreach for the Sisters in such situations is the witness of one’s life of love and service.

\textit{The Sisters’ Ministry Among Peoples of Other Faiths: Interfaith Dialogue}

The Sisters’ work for justice, peace and reconciliation was another avenue for opportunities for encounters with other faiths. Advice and encouragement was given to the Sisters through the Asian Bishops’ Conferences. During one such meeting, Cardinal Rosales, Papal Legate, conveyed Pope Benedict XVI’s wish that the Bishops of Asia “manifest, by their renewed strength and zeal, the love of Christ, the Church and the Gospel … [and] foster human culture and diligently pursue dialogue among the peoples”.\textsuperscript{149} This cannot be attempted without the underpinning of a sound spirituality as the Sisters’ Foundress had advocated.

The Sisters continued their ministry amongst peoples of other religions, being encouraged by the Vatican Council document, \textit{Nostra Aetate}. Besides their own Catholic spirituality, the Sisters involved themselves in prayer, reflection, and dialogue with those of other Christian


\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{148} Alma Dufault, in her report to the Enlarge General Council of 1982, in \textit{For the Mission and Its Risks}, 246.

denominations and other faiths. These experiences broadened the Charism of the Institute, opening the Sisters to the awareness of God’s presence already alive and active in other faiths, as expressed in *Nostra Aetate*, they “recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral…found amongst these people” [NA #7].

In a new initiative for the Vatican, in February 1968, the Superior General, Mother Sainte Agnes, was appointed a ‘consultant’ to the “Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples with four other superior generals – the first opening to one of the ministries of the Church to the world of women!”150 This invitation allowed the Sisters to be more involved with ministering to peoples of other faiths. This was another means of service to the Church by the Sisters, utilising their experiences of ministering amongst peoples of other religions.

As the Sisters have been present in the Muslim territories for some time; for instance, in North Africa since 1885 and in the Ottoman Empire since 1905,151 they were in a position to take up this new approach of Interfaith Dialogue. Having been in Bethlehem in Palestine since 1909, managing a house for poor women and a dispensary, the Sisters were also studying Arabic. They expanded their ministry by opening a house for pilgrims and a workshop for women. They have continued in Palestine following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. In 1974 the Sisters opened their first house within a Jewish community, and after studying Hebrew, they set up various health services, according to their charism.152 They have engaged in interfaith dialogue following the recommendations in *Nostra Aetate*. They work for peace and the advancement of the Palestinians whilst at the same time continuing to condemn anti-Semitism.153 This was a new ministry which recalled the Foundress’ advice to respect the peoples’ religions by not proselytizing. The Sisters repeated this advice at their 1972-73 General Chapter, as noted earlier: “To establish contacts and dialogue in mutual esteem, without proselytizing, in a simplicity characterised by respect.”154

In their insertions in Asia the Sisters live amongst peoples of many different faiths. In fact, Asia is the birthplace of the world’s major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam; all have

151 Cf. Ibid., 458.
152 Cf. Ibid., 459-465.
154 1972-73 General Chapter Documents, 55.
their roots in Asia: "...Asia, witnessed the birth of several of the world’s great religious movements. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism: Each of these religious systems certainly located in distinct regions of the continent [is] deeply rooted in the people and [shows] much vigor." The Asian theologian, Aloysius Pieris added: “Each of the world faiths, born in Asia, has rooted itself in local, cosmic or tribal (primal) cultures.”

The unique aspects of each religion, then, need to be acknowledged and become an important element of any dialogue. For this reason the Asian Churches and hence the Asian FMM Sisters, have a great deal to offer the rest of the Church and the Institute through what they have learnt on how to dialogue with the peoples of these religions. For instance, the Sisters live and minister amongst Muslim peoples, for instance, in Malaysia, Pakistan, Morocco and India, as already mentioned, and have much to offer.

In 1984 a document was published as an excellent guide for interfaith dialogue. It proposed four approaches:

1. The Dialogue of Life. This consists in the way of acting towards the other; with concern, respect and hospitality.
2. The Dialogue of Works. The bishops suggest collaboration for humanitarian, social, economic and political ends which advance the liberation and development of humankind.
3. The Dialogue of Experts - to confront, enrich and deepen each one’s religious heritage and to apply their expertise to the problems of the world.
4. The Dialogue of Religious Experience. This can lead to mutual enrichment and cooperation for promoting spiritual values.

The above guidelines presume a basis of profound trust and respect between the parties. This can best be achieved firstly through sharing in the everyday activities of each other as much as possible. Sharing in the civil life of the society allows for both parties to get to know each other on common ground. Dialogue at the faith level is difficult without a solid knowledge of one’s own beliefs and those of the other. The Sisters have stressed the requirement to study

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156 Pieris, “A Point of View,” 8.
157 Cf. above, FMMs and the Missiology in Nostra Aetate.
the beliefs and sacred texts of other faiths at their various Chapters,\textsuperscript{159} to be able to continue in their ministry among peoples of other faiths. While their Foundress called for respect of the religion of the other, this was a broadening of the missionary charism; not only to respect but also to study in depth the religious beliefs and sacred texts of the other.

In 1995 Pope John Paul II reminded the Church of the necessity for dialogue in order to reach the fullness of the dignity of every human being: “Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path toward human self-realization, the self-realization both of each individual and of every human community.”\textsuperscript{160} As Missiologist Aloysius Pieris explained: “Inter-faith dialogue is possible when we are open to what is genuinely human in the other, and where our own culture is open to the transcendent.”\textsuperscript{161}

This ministry has evolved via the Sisters’ presence amongst peoples of other faiths, and is now an important aspect of the Sisters’ charism. This is stated clearly in their 1986 Constitutions:

\begin{quote}
With Christ, we want to approach everyone with a humble heart, ready to learn and to receive as much as to give, with his attitude of respect, acceptance of persons, openness and service…in relation with non-believers, and with those who profess other religions, who belong to other Christian confessions, or who are indifferent to all religion…\textsuperscript{162}
\end{quote}

The Sisters have expanded their understanding of mission now to include the above, extending their Foundress’ beliefs to acknowledge God’s action in other faiths as well as in Christianity. In this way, the Christians themselves can give expression to meaning of the Gospel for their particular culture.

\textit{Inculturation – An Important Aspect of Missiological Encounter}

Inculturation was a new reality for the Sisters as their Foundress had the opinion that European cultural was the norm, and the Gospel message was thus couched in Western terminology.

\textsuperscript{159} Cf. Chapter Six.


\textsuperscript{161} Pieris, “A Point of View,” 9.

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Constitutions of 1986}, nn.39 and 43, pages 35, 41.
Inculturation was also a new concept for most missionaries following the Second Vatican Council.

Inculturation is explained by the missiologist, Louis Luzbetak. It is lived “through dialogue, which integrates the Gospel message with the local culture into a single cognitive, attitudinal, and motivational symbolic system.”

Yet inculturation cannot be achieved if one does not know one’s own cultural reality first. Whilst the Sisters had from the beginning of their Institute lived and ministered among non-Christian peoples, an awareness of the firm commitment of these people to their own religion, as strong and profound as the Sisters’ own, had not always been recognised.

The Missiologist, Stephen Bevans, explained the importance of inculturation for every missionary: “…today there is an understanding that inculturation is not just something for a few women and men who live dangerously ‘on the edge.’ Rather, inculturation is acknowledged today as an integral part of communicating the gospel…”

In the document Evangelii Nuntiandi Pope Paul VI had stressed the importance of inculturation, the work of embedding the Gospel message into the lives and cultures of the peoples so as to make it relevant to them. This can only be achieved through a true listening to and dialogue with the peoples themselves, “so that Christ’s message may become incarnate there.”

The sociologist, Gerald Arbuckle, advised that missionaries involved in inculturation are “not to approach people with an already neatly packaged section of the Gospel message. The evangelizer must first be prepared to listen to people, to feel with them the power of their symbols in order to discover their many meanings.” Arbuckle also reminded missionaries of cultural properties: “Symbols, remember, embrace the total person, their meanings are rooted in the heart.”

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165 Cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi above.
166 1986 FMM Constitutions, #47.
168 Ibid.
In her report to the General Chapter of 1978 the Superior General explained: “We note a growing respect and esteem for the non-Christian religions, and are coming to see these religions as expressing a people’s search…” in their own culture. She continued:

Inculturation needs elements of ongoing reflection and evaluation of values are not to become confused. Inculturation places the obligation upon us to recognize and assume the values proper to each culture. Universal mission is not opposed to inculturation, but gives it its full value, in bringing it into relation with other and more universal values...the reality of inculturation requires more than ever a good basic understanding of the developing theology of mission for Sisters going into cross-cultural communities.

The realisation of the importance of education for inculturation was slowly incorporated into the deliberations and ways of ministering of the Sisters. The Superior General, in her Report to the 1978 General Chapter said that the ‘old’ ways of the Sisters doing what they thought best was to be replaced with listening to the people as they expressed their own needs:

…we see inculturation, new forms of insertions, more pastoral activity creating a new profile of the Institute: one that is no longer uniform, but which seeks to respond to the character of the Local Church where we are inserted...with a simplification of our life style, situating many of us closer to the life stream of the people to whom we are sent…

The Superior General continued, saying that there was need for greater flexibility in responding to new realities, so that the local Church itself integrates the Gospel message into its own reality.

The above work of inculturation is seen, for example when in the late 1980s, an outreach to women was begun by the Sisters in Ethiopia starting with a health centre, which quickly evolved into a hospital. A Comboni Lay Missionary serving with the Sisters wrote:

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170 Dufault, Superior General to the 1978 Chapter, *In a Dynamism of Love*, 154-155.
171 Ibid., 149. Alma Dufault repeats the Sociologist, Arbuckle, stress on the primary requirement of listening. Cf. above.
172 Ibid.
the Diocese of Awassa is working hand and hand with the FMM Sisters to move forward and forge a collaborative partnership with the government to upgrade Bushulo into a fully specialized “Mother and Child Health Centre”. It would be the first and only specialized MCH centre in the whole south of Ethiopia (30 million people)… one thing is certain: if ever the term “evidence-based development” could be aptly applied to a project, it is for the future of Bushulo, where need and opportunity meet at the service of the poor.173

In their Constitutions of 1986, the Sisters stressed the urgency of being grounded in one’s own culture, *enculturation*, “…entering into one’s own culture, in order to be able to facilitate the inculturation of the gospel message wherever they go.”174

In 1994 the Superior General of the day, Maura O’Connor, was invited to address the Special Bishops’ Synod for Africa. Speaking of the importance of the context in which one ministers, she said that “there is a need for all of us who are involved in the Church’s mission to look at particular situations and to ask ourselves if we are in fact serving as agents of communion.”175 She continued, saying the great challenge is to “respect African sensitivities and mentalities. We are called upon to form new attitudes towards dialogue and to do much searching together.”176 This call for respect and dialogue has been reiterated throughout the Institute, especially at General Chapters.177

At the 1996 General Chapter, an essential means of preparation for mission was pointed out, advising the Sisters to look at themselves first: “The starting point is to take the path of conversion and recognise our own ‘ethnocentrism’. ”178 This requirement was essential for the new ministries which had opened for the Sisters when they were to be involved in the religious formation of the laity.

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173 Mark Banga, “Bushulo Catholic Health Centre: Evidenced-based development with beautiful results for Ethiopian women and children.” (Received by email from the Sisters in Bushulo, Ethiopia 9 April, 2014).
174 *Constitutions of 1986*, Art. 46.
175 Maura O’Connor, FMM, in *An Ongoing Pentecost*, 487.
176 Ibid., 488.
177 Cf. 1996 and 2008 General Chapter documents.
178 Ibid.
New Ministries for the Sisters

New ministries opened for the Sisters with a theological background. Within the lifetime of the Foundress theological formation was limited; however, following the Second Vatican Council all Religious were being encouraged to take up theological studies. The importance of knowledge of one’s own faith was widely recognised.

In her report to the 1978 General Chapter, the Superior General wrote of the expansion of the Sisters’ ministries following the new openness to the ministry of formation of the laity. This required that the Sisters have a sound theological foundation:

The greater number of requests for new insertions today has been for pastoral work including new ministries and the formation of the laity. There is a growing awareness among our sisters that our objective in such insertions is generally to collaborate in the creation of a certain foundation for the Christian community which in time will become missionary, allowing us to move on to other places.179

A further expansion of the Sisters’ mission was in 1984 when the Superior General, Alma Dufault, was invited by the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar to collaborate in the Catholic Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM). This Centre was created in order to assist in the development of an African Church.180 One of the aims of the Centre is: “The BICAM shall foster, promote and be itself energetically in Biblical Study and Scientific Scriptural investigations with African perspectives.”181 “… to achieve some integration between the African pre-Christian religious experience and African Christian commitment in ways that would ensure the integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood.”182 The involvement of the Sisters in this group was an opportunity for assisting the inculturation of the Gospel. It was also seen as in accordance with the missionary desire of their Foundress for the formation of lay persons for ministry.

179 Alma Default, Superior General, in *A Dynamic of Love*, 151.
182 Kwame Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century.”
Summary

The changes to religious life made by Pope John XXIII and the Council participants continued to inspire the Sisters. They re-affirmed the necessity of a sound formation in spirituality and theology for their life of ministry. They began studying other religions and cultures so as to be able to serve better the interests of the Reign of God.

Regarding missionary work in Asia, as pointed out above, each of the world faiths were born in Asia. Thus, the imposition of a European expression of Christianity negates the meaning of the word ‘Catholic,’ universal, open to all.

The Sisters responded to the request of the Second Vatican Council participants to return to the roots of their Foundress. They continued their study and reflection on the aim of their Institute and its relevance for the new millennium.

The Sisters continued their Foundress’ deep concern for the wellbeing of everyone, but particularly women and children. Following the Second Vatican Council it was acknowledged that each culture and religion has values of their own. The Sisters opened themselves to the new ministries of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the example of St Francis of Assisi. They expanded upon their Foundress’ vision, opening the Sisters to a deeper involvement in the universal mission of the Church.

As a result of their study, they revised their Eurocentric and restricted understanding of Christianity, and opened themselves to the new world order of Globalisation. This brought with it a greater expansion of their means of missionary outreach.
CHAPTER EIGHT
The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in the Twenty-First Century:
“Where are You Leading Us?”

Overview
The missiology of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary has continued to evolve since the Foundress’ death as seen in the previous chapters. Two major evolutions have occurred in the Institute; the first, from the institutional, semi-monastic and devotional nature of the Institute in the time of the Foundress, to the expansion of the understanding of their mission brought about by the decisions of the Second Vatican Council.

The second major change in the trajectory of the Institute which was brought about by the post-modern society, especially through the globalisation of economies and cultures. The Sisters live their ministry by taking account of the practices of the past, and at the same time reading the signs of the times to discern to where the Spirit is leading them in this new millennium.

Using a prayer of Helene, ‘Where are you leading me?’, the Superior General in 2008, prayed on behalf of the Institute: “Where are You leading us?”¹ This prayer was the guiding theme for the Sisters’ General Chapter, encouraging them to look to the signs of their own times, while keeping in mind their original charism. A primary issue for the Sisters as for the whole world is the globalisation of economies and cultures. At their 2008 Chapter, the Sisters also re-affirmed the essential Franciscan characteristic of their Charism in accordance with their Foundress’ vision.

Globalisation: A Mixed Blessing

In Helene’s time in the nineteenth century as seen in Chapters One and Two, inventions such as the steam engine and the telegraph opened Europe to wider and faster travel and means of communication. Workers suffered during Helene’s time as machines took over much of the

¹ Sr Christiane Megarbane, FMM, “Report to the General Chapter 2008.”
need for numerous workers and factories opened. Now the twentieth century saw more extraordinary advances, with an intensification of the effects of Industrial Revolution, as even more machines replaced workers. The globalisation of economies and cultures is a threat to the smaller races and nations who are losing control of their own destiny.

This new type of colonialism arose in which wealthy nations manipulated smaller, less powerful nations. Rather than the dominant nations colonising the countries, these less developed nations are ‘milked’ for the commodities which the developed countries require to provide necessities such as cheap labour or minerals. They need certain minerals for the ever-increasing demand for better, more interactive mobile phones. Some minerals are mined in conditions of armed conflict and human rights abuses within certain countries, and sold or traded by the armed groups such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the various parties in the longstanding civil war have commandeered resources to fund their violent activities. Another country drastically affected by mining for minerals is Indonesia: “In Bangka... excessive tin mining was found to have dramatically changed the natural landscape, leaving acidic craters in place of lush forests and making clean drinking water harder to come by.”

Robots and the digital technology no longer required so many workers. The shipping of goods from one country to another using huge containers has resulted in a sharp drop in the number of workers required. Again, machines have replaced the dock workers in many instances. This has led to new challenges on behalf of workers and their families. As the Missiologist David Bosch noted: “We have truly entered into an epoch fundamentally at variance with anything we have experienced to date ...Centralization, Bureaucratization, ecological damage, manipulation and exploitation of human beings, relentless consumerism and chronic unemployment.”

The Sisters, through their connections internationally, strive to conscientise people to the need for longer-lasting and recyclable smartphones and other gadgets which require precious and

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4 Evert Hassink from Friends of the Earth, quoted in Nield, “Our Smartphone addiction...”
rare minerals. They also promote the concept of ‘Sadat’, meaning to use and/or buy only what is necessary, and not what one would want.\(^6\)

The new commodities, however, were a mixed blessing. New studies such as in cosmology, anthropology and sociology, brought about greater knowledge of cultures and the universe which was able to promote human dignity. Technological inventions such as the world wide web, the internet and the mobile phone have allowed almost immediate access to knowledge previously available only to a small percentage of the world’s population. A challenge of these inventions for the future of the mission of the Catholic Church has been expressed by Michael Kelly SJ: “What difference will it make to Catholics and the Church’s operations when more than two thirds of the planet’s population is interacting in cyberspace?”\(^7\) Kelly continued regarding the inertia within the leadership of the Church to the inevitable changes which technology will bring about:

Cultural change is what makes or breaks the Church’s ability to proclaim the Gospel in compelling and persuasive ways. And our record isn’t great on that score. It took 150 years for Vatican authorities to wake up to the invention of printing by Gutenberg. It was Luther who saw its potential, translated the Bible from Latin into national languages and put the Word of God into the hands of anyone who could read it.\(^8\)

For many centuries ordinary Catholics were denied the right to read the Bible as it was not permitted to be translated from the Latin. Catholic had to generally rely on the priests’ sermons to hear the Gospel message.\(^9\) Nowadays, Catholics are encouraged to read the Bible daily. For instance, in the Second Vatican Document *Dei Verbum*, stated that Bible be translated into many languages.\(^10\)

\(^{6}\) Cf. The “Sadat,” ‘Enough’ campaign of the Sisters of 1994, to use/buy only what is necessary, and encourage care for the earth and its resources amongst all their contacts.


\(^{8}\) Ibid.


Because of the advances in media components, human rights abuses can now be broadcast outside of the offending area, and the perpetrators can be called to account.\textsuperscript{11} For instances, regarding Burundi, the United Nations investigators were drafting a confidential list of suspected perpetrators of crimes against humanity. Burundi subsequently has withdrawn from the International Criminal Court, after accusations of torture and executions against the leaders.\textsuperscript{12} Yet a devastating outcome of these advances in media and travel is the trafficking in humans.

\textit{Globalisation and Trafficking in Humans.}

A devastating aspect of globalisation is the increase in the trafficking in human beings: “We live in an economy in which ‘disposability’ – not just of goods, but of people, relationships… is the hallmark of consumption.”\textsuperscript{13} Today Trafficking in human beings is a multi-billion-dollar industry.\textsuperscript{14} Trafficking in humans has been made easier through the extraordinary developments in mass media and numerous modes of transportation. The Sisters are deeply involved in addressing this evil throughout their communities worldwide, and with other organisations such as Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans [ACRATH].\textsuperscript{15} The multicultural and multi-ethnic make-up of the Institute has situated the Sisters to be able to coordinate their efforts to continue promoting peace and development. The Sisters own cultural diversity witnesses to others of this possibility of cooperation.


\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Chapter Seven, Ministry Cooperation Between Religious Congregations.
**Globalisation and the Loss of Languages**

Western control of economies, cultures and the prominence of the English language have become dominant in many parts of the world. The United Nations reported the effect this had on the languages of the world:

> It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century. With the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages, humanity would lose not only a cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded, in particular, in indigenous languages.\(^\text{16}\)

In Australia for instance, at the time of the British invasion (1788) there were approximately 250 local languages spoken. Yet, today… “…only 145 of Australia’s more than 250 known indigenous languages continue actually to be spoken. In addition, approximately 110 of them have been classified as severely or critically endangered.”\(^\text{17}\) The Sisters work to promote the use of the local languages of the peoples, for instance, in their foundation in Alice Springs, in central Australia.

The Sisters have continued their Foundress’ deep concern to preserve the languages of the peoples amongst whom they live and work. By doing this, they also help to preserve the local cultures. Whilst Helene set up printing presses in many countries in order to educate and to evangelise in the local languages, the Sisters have continued this aim through their catechetical programs, schools, hospitals, and so on, using the latest technologies. For instance, where possible the Sisters now utilise multiple media formats such as computers, television programs, and the internet, and train the local people to use them as well.

**Church Critiques of Globalisation**

Various popes over the years have condemned the manipulation of the poor by the wealthier members of society. In 1891, Leo XIII attacked unbridled capitalism in his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*: “...the hiring of labour and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of


comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the
teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself” [RN #3].

In 1967 Pope Paul VI condemned unchecked liberalism in his encyclical, *Populorum
Progressio* [#26]. The Pope stated: “...there are the flagrant inequalities not merely in the
enjoyment of possessions, but even more in the exercise of power [PP #9]. Paul VI then
suggested three duties of Christians with regard to international relationships: “1) mutual
solidarity—the aid that the richer nations must give to developing nations; 2) social justice—
the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations; 3) universal charity” [PP
#44]. Sadly, now fifty years after the publication of this Encyclical, this call by the Pope has
not been adequately taken up, and numerous nations are still suffering greatly. Yet Paul VI
recognised the efforts of missionaries on behalf of others:

Besides erecting sacred edifices, her missionaries have also promoted construction
of hospitals, sanitariums, schools and universities. By teaching the native
population how to take full advantage of natural resources, the missionaries often
protected them from the greed of foreigners [PP #12].

From their Foundation the Sisters have been educating the peoples to protect themselves and
their environment from the greed of a few. As seen in Chapters Five and Six, the Sisters have
concerned themselves with awareness-raising of the need for education, especially of women
and children in accordance with their founding Charism.

A Latin American evaluation of globalisation was given at the Bishops’ Conference in 2013:

In its current form, globalization is incapable of interpreting and reacting in
response to objective values that transcend the market and that constitute what is
most important in human life: truth, justice, love, and most especially, the dignity
and rights of all, even those not included in the market.20

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19 Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-
20 Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conferences held at Aparacida,
Confronting Destructive Globalisation

The foundation of the United Nations in 1945 was designed to promote peace and economic development worldwide. Yet on the contrary, a new form of globalisation, especially of the economies of the world, has become a means of the hegemony by the powerful, rich nations. It has had the opposite effect, as missiologist, John Prior, expressed it: “An unbridled, global economy is placing consumerist, materialistic values at the center of life. A violently competitive capitalist ideology alien to local cultures is turning people and nature into instruments of the global marketplace.” Prior explained further: “…the globalizing culture itself, the culture of the transnationals, of international trade treaties and of the commercial side of the internet, sometimes called the ‘McDonaldisation’ of culture.”

The globalisation of economies and cultures as pointed out by John Prior, is based on the insatiable greed of many multinational companies in numerous first world countries. The financial crisis of 2008, is an example of this total disregard for the poor:

THE collapse of Lehman Brothers, a sprawling global bank, in September 2008, almost brought down the world’s financial system. It took huge taxpayer-financed bail-outs to shore up the industry. Even so, the ensuing credit crunch turned what was already a nasty downturn into the worst recession in 80 years...

As a universal Institute, the Sisters take account of the advice of Prior, guarding against mirroring the ‘McDonaldisation’ of culture. As mentioned above, the Sisters promote the use of the local languages and culture in their various ministries. They also train women to be as self-sufficient as they can, particularly by setting up micro-finance units, educational facilities and health clinics. They do this for instance, in Mindanao in the Philippines, along with their Lay Associates, assisting the ‘scavenger’ families, running a feeding centre and preparing food packs for street families, and educating the street children. They also engage in interfaith dialogue with the Muslim community there.

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21 Cf. Chapter Six, Peace Efforts following the Wars.
23 Prior, SVD, “Dialogue and Culture.”
25 Cf. Ibid.
26 Cf. Chapter Five, Professional Formation.
In her address, to the 2008 General Chapter the Superior General spelt out the importance of the mission of the Sisters to confront this global reality:

In the globalised yet fragmented world in which we are inserted, living solidarity, communion, gratuity, reciprocity and reconciliation between peoples, nations, regions, cultures, ethnic groups, provinces and communities through our sending remains an important witness.\(^\text{28}\)

The type of globalisation that dominates others is a new phenomenon which was not widely evident during Helene’s time. It has given rise to the need for new ministries for mission. In 2008 the Superior General of the FMM pointed out some of the new challenges facing the Institute in the twenty-first century as a result of Globalisation: “New forms of evangelization emerge as we face issues in our globalized world. We are challenged to discern the new areopagi and commit ourselves to them.”\(^\text{29}\) The method of discernment is firstly to study the reality round them, and then through prayer, to discover God’s will: “A contemplative way of seeing recognizes the poor are places of God’s revelation.”\(^\text{30}\)

The Sisters then expanded further on how to proceed: “We desire to move forward together as a community which discerns, accompanies, supports and is interested in each one’s personal ministries, so they are included in the missionary thrust of the community.”\(^\text{31}\)

The missiologist John Prior wrote of the destructive possibilities of globalisation of cultures: “A global, materialistic world order is edging out the spiritual, moral and compassionate ‘composite cultures’ of Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Christian and primal peoples.”\(^\text{32}\)

The Sisters are cooperating with various organisations to address these issues, such as the Major Superiors of the world [UISG], the United Nations, Franciscans International, and the Baptist Church.\(^\text{33}\) The Baptist community in Australia has rated and published the performance of numerous international companies in areas such as safe working conditions, just wages and appropriate working hours: *Behind the Barcode*.\(^\text{34}\) This organisation exposes the companies

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\(^\text{29}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{30}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{31}\) Ibid., 31.
\(^\text{32}\) John Prior, “Dialogue and Culture.”
\(^\text{33}\) Cf. Chapter Seven, *New Ministries for the Sisters*.
\(^\text{34}\) “*Behind the Barcode*” is a project of Baptist World Aid Australia, www.behindthebarcode.org.au (accessed 6 July, 2015).
which do not comply to the very basic requirements for their workers. The Sisters in their turn have publicised these results throughout their international networks.

As seen previously, the poor have remained the primary focus of the Sisters following their Foundress’ aspiration, as she said, it is with the poor that God is to be found.35

Researcher Joan Daw, writing on globalisation, expressed more of its very destructive consequences, especially the forced mobilisation of vast numbers of peoples:

Globalization, with its homogenizing imperative, undermines and destroys local communities and their languages and traditions…Increasingly, however, with the migration of people for work, the emergence of growing mega-cities leads to environments in which people are thrown together.36

Immigration continues to be a matter of serious debate today, particularly when Australia is treating asylum seekers arriving by boats as pariahs. It refuses them visas and even has transported them to other nations as a deterrent to future arrivals. It is ironic that the Australian government is not so concerned with those who can afford to come by aeroplane: “Stop the boats is the catch-cry of the asylum seeker debate, but the majority of arrivals come to Australia by plane and many are using dodgy documents to gain residence.”37 Another report stated: “Statistics from 2008 showed at least 13 asylum seekers arrive through Australian airports daily, more than 32 times the number of boat people supposedly ‘flooding’ across our maritime borders in that year.”38

Following the Foundress’ vision of concern for the poorest, the Sisters continue their work with various groups, both religious and secular, seeking justice for asylum seekers and refugees. An Australian Sister, Aileen Crowe, has carried out research through a PhD on the

subject to assist all those involved in this ministry in Australia. As will be seen below, some of the major reasons for people seeking refuge are poverty and violence.

**Globalisation and Poverty**

In 1992 the Australia bishops issued a statement on the distribution of wealth within Australia, *Common Wealth for the Common Good.* This in-depth analysis of the situation of many peoples in Australia showed the extent of suffering and deprivation of a considerable percentage of its citizens. The bishops state that the responsibility of each citizen is not only to one’s own country but also to the global community:

> When the question of wealth creation in Australia is seen in a world framework, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between those kinds of growth which contribute to human welfare globally and those which exploit other peoples or damage the environment.

In 2005 a campaign was begun to bring the world’s attention to the vicious cycle of poverty: *Make Poverty History* “…poverty is automatically visited on the next generation as the children enter adulthood, blighting generations.” This campaign linked with the United Nations endeavour to address world poverty through the Eight Millennium Goals:

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest.

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41 Ibid., 88.
42 “Make Poverty History” is the name of organizations in a number of countries, forming a coalition of aid and development agencies which work together to raise awareness of global poverty and achieve policy change by governments. Cf. http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/takeaction/
The Sisters have been deeply involved in this project, internationally with the United Nations and Franciscans International, and locally within their own Provinces and communities. In Australia, for instance, the Sisters cooperate with the Social Justice groups, especially with Social Policy Connections45 and their local groups representing Franciscans International:

To determine just what the search for peace, justice and human rights means in practice, of course, and how to bring about conditions for the flourishing of people of all beliefs, are the tasks confronting us... one of our most pressing tasks is to harness our immense economic and social resources to eradicate hunger and the worst forms of poverty.46

As Bruce Duncan pointed out, Pope Francis attacks fundamental tenets of ‘trickle-down’ neo-liberal economic philosophy:

...some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.47

Bruce Duncan called to mind Pope Francis’ call for Social Justice: “This is a critical moment in history for the church to make a substantial contribution to rebuilding the moral foundations of economics and of the whole process of globalisation.”48 In 1991 the Sisters had set up Social Justice committees in each of their Provinces, under the heading “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.”49 Sr Rose Fernando was named the coordinator and was based in the Mother House. Her role was to coordinate their responses to such issues, according to their Foundress’ concern for the integral welfare of all peoples.50

45 Cf. www.socialpolicyconnections.com.au/; “Social Policy Connections draws on the rich resources of the Christian social traditions, and works to bring them into creative engagement with contemporary challenges to human wellbeing.”


50 Ibid.
An African perspective of Globalisation, of a positive nature, has been given by Joseph Ogbonnaya: “…the phenomenon that integrates the economic, cultural, social, political and religious dimensions of human existence towards improved standard of living for humanity.”

There has been an improvement in the quality of life of many peoples. Yet, as research has shown, while global extreme poverty is actually being reduced, inequality continues to rise.

The Sisters who are ministering on the African continent focus particularly on the formation and development of women. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the Sisters have organised various micro-finance groups so that the families can achieve some regular income.

Globalisation has led to a reaction to seek newer ways and practices in the face of the persistent inequality. This has resulted in many losing hope in the current situation and turning to a fundamentalist approach to religion.

**Globalisation and Fundamentalism**

John Prior wrote of causes of fundamentalism, “the rise of cultural and religious fanaticism among the losers of the globalizing process, a strong reaction to the marginalization of local culture leading to frantic cultural encapsulation.” When their cultures and religions are threatened, ‘the losers’ react in an effort to regain their significance and life-meaning:

Fundamentalists find rapid change emotionally extremely disturbing and dangerous. Cultural, religious and personal certitudes are shaken. Consequently, fundamentalists simplistically yearn to return to a utopian past or golden age, purified of dangerous ideas and practices…Membership of fundamentalist groups is not a question of logic, but generally of a sincere, but misguided, search for meaning and belonging.

A number of Catholics in Latin America have sought to belong to other Church communities, and the Latin American Bishops searched for the reason for this phenomenon. They found

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53 From Ivy Khoury, FMM, Caritas International Representative for East Africa.
54 Prior, “Dialogue and Culture.”
that the above definition of fundamentalism was helpful. People are seek meaning and fulfilment which they have not found in the Church; they seek communities that respond to their need for a spirituality that nourishes them:

In our pastoral experience, often sincere people who leave our church do not do so because of what “non-Catholic” groups believe, but fundamentally for what they live; not for doctrinal but for vivential reasons; not for strictly dogmatic, but for pastoral reasons; not due to theological problems, but to methodological problems of our Church. They hope to find answers to their concerns.\textsuperscript{56}

The Sisters do what they can to assist the youth, especially those in rural areas. For instance, through their “Rural Youth Ministry” in Nicaragua, they train local leaders. As one the Team shared: “We value who each other are and we seek to help the youth of our parish grow as persons and to commit themselves to their faith.”\textsuperscript{57} The Sisters strive to overcome fundamentalism wherever they encounter it through their ministry of catechesis. In their high schools, for instance, in Korea at St Mary’s High School, the Sisters concentrate on Catholic values.\textsuperscript{58} Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, a deeply distressing aspect of globalisation is the trafficking of humans.

\textit{Globalisation and Care for the Earth}

Scientific research has shown that the whole earth shares the same air and water as it circulates the globe. Redemptorist priest Bruce Duncan warned of the ever-increasing danger to the survival of whole nations on this planet:

Our generation faces unprecedented challenges, with opportunities as well as threats. The dangers arising from global warming and climate change emphasise as never before that the entire world is in this together, and we will need to develop new ways of cooperating to reduce the likely severe consequences.\textsuperscript{59}

As can be seen from the above overwhelming detrimental effects of globalisation, there is an urgency to respond effectively. The Sisters are in a good position to assist, as they are present in so many continents. Their efforts are being co-ordinated with others working for the same

\textsuperscript{57} Team member, in “Meeting Space,” January - February 2011, 18.
\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Meeting Space, January - February 2011, 14.
end: the preservation of the earth and therefore, whole nations. An example of the Sisters’ work for justice and peace is when some Sisters participated in the 8th Networking Meeting of the Justice and Peace Workers Asia Pacific Forum held in Cambodia in 2010. Four issues were chosen at the gathering to be the focus for the next two years: Land, Human Trafficking, Migrant Workers and Rights of Minority. The Sisters have taken up these issues, liaising with their international communities and cooperating with other organisations such as the Major Superiors internationally and the United Nations. The Sisters were to discern the people’s needs in the new era and respond with new and appropriate ministries: “We are called to defend life, justice and human dignity especially among persons and groups who are exploited, victims of human trafficking or other abuses.”

One of the ways of responding to the new reality was for the Sisters to commit themselves to “Justice, Peace and the ecology, through conscientising, advocacy, and networking.” They carry out this commitment through their own internal networks, and through cooperation with other organisations such as the Franciscans International, the United Nations and the Union of Major Superiors [UISG]. They do this in accordance with their Foundress’ vision of care for the poorest and most needy. The Sisters see their involvement as participating in the witness to missionary aspect of prophetic dialogue.

In their Mission Booklet, the Sisters posed the following question for reflection in the contexts of their communities: “How will Christianity participate in the Missio Dei in these contexts, which call for peace, reconciliation and interreligious dialogue? How will this reshape Christianity?” At their 2008 General Chapter the Sisters indicated: “Reconciliation is a path of Mission. It is at the heart of the Gospel and of mission according to Francis. It is a priority especially in situations of interreligious dialogue, ecumenism and also wherever there are deep divisions...” The Sisters throughout the world responded, each within their own Provinces. For instance, in South Korea, the Sisters have a High school for girls from various religions; less than five percent of the students are Catholics. Sister Veronica Choi explained her...
approach to the girls: “Helping them to find who they are and to dream of a bright future, is the joy of my mission.”

A challenge was offered for all people to their utmost for peace and reconciliation following some serious violations of human rights:

Can we really talk about a missiology of sight? If we had been able to ‘see the other’ might the genocide in Rwanda never have happened? If we were able to ‘see the other’ might the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the civil war in Northern Ireland, the ignorance and apathy concern Sudan and Congo, apartheid in South African…might all this have been avoided – if only we could see?

As seen in previous chapters, the Sisters were ministering during civil wars and conflicts, and they still strive for peace and reconciliation amongst the peoples. In South Africa, for instance, the Sisters have a community amongst the displaced Black people. They have a day care centre, school, and do pastoral work in a number of outstations.

The delegates to the 2008 General Chapter reiterated the important aspects of their ministry of reconciliation which was also highlighted at a previous General Chapter in 1972-73:

Reconciliation is a path of Mission. It is at the heart of the Gospel and of mission according to Francis. It is a priority especially in situations of interreligious dialogue, ecumenism and also wherever there are deep divisions, e.g.: xenophobia, terrorism, fundamentalism...etc. Our international/intercultural communities, desired by Mary of the Passion from the beginning, are called to be committed to this way of reconciliation.

In 2013 Pope Francis emphasised the necessity of continually reading the signs of the times: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective

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68 Phuong Thi Phi Thao, FMM “Esibusweni, Place of blessing.” Meeting Space (January - February 2011), 23.
69 General Chapter Document of 2008. Cf. also previous Chapter on Reconciliation.
communities.”

This invitation can be taken up by the Sisters in accordance with their Foundress’ vision.

THE FMM Response to Pope Francis’ Invitation

Taking up the invitation of Pope Francis above, the Sisters have chosen to rethink their structures, beginning with the community life of the Sisters. They are doing this through a series of meetings throughout the world. Provincials from one Province have been coordinators of meetings in a Province other than their own. Thus, they have the opportunity to hear from Sisters of another culture, nation, and context. In this way, the Sisters are continuing their manner of discernment using the See-Judge-Act of the Young Christian Workers [YCW].

As this process is only beginning, the results are beyond the timeline of this thesis. However, the feedback can lead to further studies and papers by the author of this thesis and by other Sisters, keeping in mind the invitation of the Pope: to rethink their goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization. The outcome of these gatherings will be relayed to the Sisters throughout the Institute through their General and Provincial Chapters.

The challenge for the Sisters is to remember the basic values in their Charism: to go to the poorest, to those who have not yet heard of Christ, whilst at the same time reading the signs of the times. The context in which each Sister and community is situated will require adaptation. As discussed at the Sisters’ 2008 General Chapter, ‘community’ does not require all the Sisters to live under one roof; hence, the Sisters can be more flexible. They can serve the poor, work with other organisations such as the United Nations and Franciscans International, and serve for a limited time if required with other organisations; for instance, for refugees and victims of human trafficking. As they are an international Institute, they are well-positioned to advocate on behalf of the poor. By living and working amongst peoples of

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71 These meetings are in progress at the time of writing.

all faiths and cultures, they are intimately involved in Interfaith Dialogue. They can be the voice of the voiceless, challenging the structures of globalisation which dehumanise, and counter the greed of certain companies which also devastate the ecological systems of the whole world.\textsuperscript{73}

**Summary**

From the end of the Second Vatican Council [1965] there have been extraordinary developments in the Church and in society. The recognition of the value of other religions has opened the Sisters to the treasures within these religions. Despite the difficulties of interfaith dialogue, it was seen as an important part of their missionary life. They continue to engage in this effort to promote the wellbeing of all peoples. They also continue their efforts to overcome the evils of Globalisation and work with others in doing this. They particularly promote the wellbeing of all peoples in the face of the devastating effects of the globalisation, especially that of trafficking in humans. Another challenge is minimising the damage to the environment whilst at the same time promoting the wellbeing of all peoples as part of their Franciscan spirit.

CONCLUSION

There have been three major changes in the evolution of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. The Institute at its foundation was based on the required monastic style of religious life for women’s communities. This included European-based religious practices, prayers in Latin, and a life-style which suited European conditions. The role of the Superior was paramount; obedience to one’s Superior was considered important for the management of the Institute. The style of the religious Habit also reflected the European basis of the Institute. This monastic life-style continued to be the norm until the Second Vatican Council. The Institute expanded rapidly from its foundation until the late 1960s. This was partly due to the changes in society with regard to the level of education of women and their roles in society in general and in the Church.

The second evolution within the Institute was initiated by the Second Vatican Council, especially through the changes recommended in the documents *Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate, Ad Gentes* and *Perfectae Caritatis*. These were the most significant for the Institute since its foundation. The Council opened the Church and the Institute to other religions and cultures. This was a major change in the direction of the Institute – from a belief that Catholicism was the only true religion, and that the European culture was superior to all others, to a realisation that God has been and still is very active in all peoples, religions and cultures.

The recommendations which came from this gathering called for all Religious to adapt themselves to the signs of the times. As women in general now had access to education as never before, the Institute opened the decision-making processes to include all the Sisters. The Sisters were encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and for the Institute. The Sisters were now able to live and work amongst the people, rather than being somewhat confined to a convent. The vernacular was introduced into the prayers of the Church as well as the Institute. In this way, the local languages of the Sisters and of the peoples with whom they worked was valued.

A further evolution within the Institute occurred with the globalisation of the affairs of the nations. Large, wealthy nations manipulated smaller, more vulnerable nations to provide their desires for more and better commodities. This frequently resulted in the destruction of the
ecology and cultures of the less powerful nations. This phenomenon offered the Sisters new challenges to work with others in the promotion and protection of entire cultures and lands. Special areas include enhancing the relationships within the family, working to improve the economic situations which prevent access to health and education, justice and peace, and combatting human trafficking.

The three phases of the Institute have resulted in major changes in the lives of the Sisters, from a conventual existence to a deeper, more intimate involvement with the peoples they served. Yet they have preserved their Foundress’ unique, universal and Franciscan spirit. For instance, in her concern especially for women and children, the awareness of the extent and effects of slavery and trafficking in humans. This remains an ongoing challenge to the Sisters in all their communities throughout the world.

Having carried out research into the evolution of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, it is now possible to indicate what has been preserved of the Foundress’ missiology, and what has evolved due to changes in the world and the Church:

The aspects of the Missiology of the Sisters which have continued from their Foundress:

- Helene’s aim of spreading the love of God throughout the world.
- The Franciscan affiliation and spirituality.
- Not proselytising but spreading the Gospel by one’s life of love and service.
- The universality and international/intercultural nature of the communities thus witnessing to the universality of the Christian message.
- The foundational ‘contemplatives-in-action’ way of life of the Sisters.
- The preferential option for the poor, especially for women and children.
- Universal mission, being sent beyond one’s own national identity and borders.
- To the poorest, most distant, where Christ has not yet been revealed.
- The integral liberation of the person, beyond the ‘spiritual’.
- The importance of knowledge of the local language.

What has evolved of Helene’s vision:

- The recognition that God’s Spirit is present and active throughout the world, not just within Christianity.
- Understanding that each religion is a possible expression of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Involvement in ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.
• The acknowledgement that European culture is not the benchmark for all societies; that each culture is to be respected as of intrinsic value.
• The theology of the ‘anger’ of God and the need to make reparation to the insults to God, which put human reactions and feelings onto God.
• The theology of Mary of Nazareth, placing her in her rightful place in the Communion of Saints.
• The need for a comprehensive knowledge of the religious and social milieu in which one is ministering.

As can be seen from the above summaries, the Sisters have been faithful to their Foundress’ vision, whilst at the same time expanding their understanding of their Charism in response to the changes within society and the Church. They observe the directive in the Code of Canon Law of 1983: “All must observe faithfully the mind and designs of the founders regarding the nature, purpose, spirit, and character of an institute, which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority.”
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