

CHARLES HERGENROEDER, C.SS.R.

BLESSED BARBARA MAIX (1818-1873)  
AND THE REDEMPTORISTS OF VIENNA

*Introduction*

In November 2010 Barbara Maix, foundress of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (with headquarters in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), was officially declared “Blessed” by the Catholic Church. Her story is intertwined with the Redemptorists of nineteenth century Vienna, Austria, especially because of her Redemptorist spiritual director, Father John Pöckl.

As is well known, since its beginnings the missionary Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists) has partnered with many groups of women religious in working for the most abandoned. Consequently they find it a distinct joy and an honor to have celebrated with the Brazilian Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary<sup>1</sup> the Beatification of Barbara Maix, their foundress.

Barbara was born on June 17, 1818, in Vienna. Her father was a servant at the royal palace of Schönbrunn. She was baptized, and frequented as a child the neighboring parish shrine of Heitzing which was dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In these environs she passed her early years in a climate of devotion to the Infant Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

According to the unanimous tradition of her religious Sisters, Barbara, as a child, had a vision of the Infant Jesus, in which he directed her: “Barbara, found a Congregation of my Blessed Mother!” Her own mother, also, was reportedly a witness to Jesus’ directive. This tradition sheds light on the extraor-

---

<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that Barbara Maix’s Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are not canonically allied with the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who were co-founded in Michigan, North America, also by a Redemptorist, in 1845.

dinary resolve which Barbara had with regards to this project since she was quite young.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside her deeply religious upbringing, it should be noted that she and her family led a life of poverty and frugality, a condition they shared with the great majority of their neighbors. In fact, her family had so few financial resources that she and her sisters could not afford their father's funeral expenses, when he suddenly passed away. A generous cousin helped them on this occasion. These events were to have a strong influence on her later life.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned, the Redemptorist priest, John Nepomucene Pöckl, was to have a major influence in the life of Barbara Maix. Pöckl was a native of Linz, Austria, born the son of a tailor on April 26, 1797. In both his earlier and later life John proved to be a successful student. Eventually he pursued higher studies in Vienna in the field of accounting. Employment followed in the Royal Accounting Office where he received several promotions and eventually commanded the respectable salary of 570 florins a year with which to support his young wife and infant daughter.<sup>4</sup>

Sadly, however, in 1828 the wife of John Pöckl died. It was then that he sensed a call to join the Redemptorists whose favorable reputation had grown in Vienna much to the credit of the Redemptorist St. Clement Hofbauer. After entrusting his daughter to the care of his deceased wife's mother, Pöckl was officially admitted into the Redemptorists in October 1828.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Bortoluzzi, Octávio Cirillo, *O Documentario*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Grafica Dom Bosco, Porto Alegre, 1996, 43. Hereinafter this work will be referenced *O Documentario*.

<sup>3</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv. Abteilung Haus, Hof- und Staatsarchiv. Wien I. Minoritenaplatz, 1 – O Me A, 1833, Nr. 2028, Fol. 62v., quoted in *O Documentario*, 45

<sup>4</sup> Hof und Staats Schematismus des Österreichischen Kaiserthumus, I Teil, Wien, 1825, 350 ss, quoted in *O Documentario*, 56.

<sup>5</sup> Another coincidental connection with the Redemptorists was that Pöckl's sister-in-law, Barbara Neuhold, in 1832 joined the "Redemptoristine Nuns." This was a group of women who, under the guidance of Hofbauer's successor, Father Joseph Passerat, founded in Vienna a monastery of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer (OSSR). The approval of the Emperor Francis I was granted on 11 November 1830. Barbara Neuhold (1805-1885) took vows in 1832; in the Order she was known as Maria Augustine of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

The period of Catholic Church history in Austria when Barbara Maix and the Redemptorist John Pöckl knew one another was a turbulent one. Generally speaking, the Austrian government oppressed the Church. It was an age when aspects of the Enlightenment still held sway; revealed faith was generally rejected while human reasoning was glorified. In practical spheres, “enlightened” government officials exercised tight control over Catholic leaders, in effect considering and treating them as minor civil servants. Aspects of so called “Josephinism,” which had been imposed by Emperor Joseph II in the late 1700s, continued to harass and regulate everyday Church life and worship, even to the point of dictating the number of candles for liturgical functions. The government closely scrutinized the content of sermons and the training of candidates for the priesthood. Barbara Maix and John Pöckl were witnesses to and sometimes victims of these governmental controls in Vienna during the 1840s.<sup>6</sup>

1. – *“Maria am Gestade”*

The place of the initial contact of John Pöckl and Barbara Maix was the Redemptorist Church in Vienna, popularly called *“Maria am Gestade.”*<sup>7</sup> In the twenty-odd years since this beautiful Gothic Church had been entrusted to the Redemptorists, their fame as extraordinary preachers had grown. Pöckl was one of these preachers, and it was he whom Barbara chose as her spiritual director and confessor.

2. – *Residence for Maidservants*

During this time of her life in Vienna, Barbara had firsthand knowledge of the urgent situation of young women who had come into the city from the countryside. Not finding honorable employment, many, in desperation, turned to prostitution

---

<sup>6</sup> HEINZMANN, Josef, *Preaching the Gospel Anew*, tr. Bernard J. McGrade, Liguori, Missouri 1998, 124-125.

<sup>7</sup> The meaning of the German phrase is “Mary on the Riverbank.”

for survival.<sup>8</sup> Because she graduated from an academy which specialized in homemaking proficiency, Barbara, along with several close friends, began to dream of a congregation of Sisters dedicated to the education of young girls and to provide help for unemployed women. Eventually she shared this dream with Father John Pöckl. She told him how she suffered seeing many young women from the countryside arriving in Vienna full of idealism, only to be shattered by the reality of conditions in a big city. Pöckl listened attentively, encouraged her, and witnessed the maturing of her project. He became “convinced that her dream was a divine inspiration and chose to give it all his support.”<sup>9</sup>

### 3. – *Following Jesus’ Call*

No doubt at this time Barbara remembered the dream she had as a youngster in which the Infant Jesus had appeared and told her, “Barbara, found a Congregation of my Blessed Mother!” The time arrived, on May 8, 1843; that Barbara, together with her six companions, met together at her modest apartment on the street named Naglergasse formally to give life to this new Congregation. It was to be dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. At the same time, she continued to consult Father John Pöckl. They were both painfully aware of the distaste had by the Austrian government for any new Religious Congregation. Moreover, even Vienna’s Archbishop Vincent Milde was opposed to any such new foundation.<sup>10</sup>

### 4. – *Institute for Maidservants*

Together Barbara Maix and Father John Pöckl decided that the best strategy for the moment was to focus not directly on founding a new group of women religious. Instead they began planning “an institute for the housing and education of young women,” which in due course took on the name *The Insti-*

---

<sup>8</sup> Records show that this desperate condition was repeatedly addressed from the pulpit at *Maria am Gestade*.

<sup>9</sup> *O Documentario*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

*tute for Maidservants*. This *Institute* (a residential program) became the justification, or ploy, for the group of friends centered around Barbara who wanted to live as a religious community. To all appearances, these friends of hers were “volunteers and staff” for the *Institute* whose outward purpose was to educate young women. But in real fact they were the core group of the future Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The archbishop could easily applaud such an *Institute* but he had no intention of encouraging a new congregation of Sisters.<sup>11</sup>

#### 5. – Purified by Fire – Redemptorists in Conflict

As Father Bortoluzzi writes in his biography of Barbara Maix: “Any of God’s undertakings on this earth passes through trials and difficulties to prove that it is of divine origin.” This was true of the new congregation which Maix had in mind. On May 8, 1843, Father Pöckl was forbidden by Father Joseph Passerat to preach in the Church of *Maria am Gestade*. He stated that he wanted Pöckl to have no contact whatever with Barbara and her community. But Pöckl had been steadily the spiritual director for Barbara and her companions since the time when they first enrolled in the classes to develop their domestic skills. By now he was thoroughly convinced that they were following the will of God.<sup>12</sup>

On December 20, 1843, Father Pöckl wrote a letter to Archbishop Milde, begging permission to continue as spiritual director of the now operative *Institute for Maidservants*. With obvious pathos, Pöckl stated, “No one else could be as enthusiastic for this cause, and sacrifice himself as much as I for this *Institute*.” Such close identification with the *Institute* strained Pöckl’s relationship with his Redemptorist superiors who continued to insist that he cut himself off from any connection with the new *Institute*.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. Incidentally, it seems that Father Joseph Passerat, Pöckl’s Redemptorist superior at first approved of Pöckl’s association with Maix, and even provided Barbara Maix with a tentative set of Rules for the proposed “new congregation of women religious.” [*Ibid.*] Passerat, as is clear, soon became opposed when he saw what was developing.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

The new *Institute* of Barbara Maix and her “volunteers” constituted a significant social outreach to numerous domestic servants in Vienna. Essentially the outreach was geared toward rescuing many young women from exploitation by wealthy business merchants and other citizens of means. This implied that the Redemptorists of *Maria am Gestade* could possibly be accused of exposing such exploitation.

On October 12, 1843, Passerat ordered Pöckl to be transferred to Innsbruck, Austria, about 340 miles to the west. In the middle of this conflict, Father Pöckl reminded Father Passerat that he had been admitted to the Redemptorists on the condition that he could continue in Vienna, so as to oversee the care of his young daughter, Susanna. As a result, Pöckl used this as an excuse not to move from Vienna.

But he was now faced with a great dilemma: either he could abandon the community of Barbara, or leave the Redemptorists so as to continue to give his support to Barbara and her companions. Before making a final decision, he wanted to make one more effort at reconciliation with his superiors, so that he could remain in Vienna. He wrote a long letter to Archbishop Milde of Vienna on October 27. He presented to the Archbishop his need to continue living near his young daughter, a point agreed upon earlier with the Redemptorists. He strongly criticized Father Passerat’s relationship with and management of the “Redemptorist Sisters.” Strangely, he also indicated that he thought there was a need for Father Passerat and his Consultors to be removed from office.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Diözesan Archiv, Wien I. Ordinariatsakten, Nr. 2980, 29 Okt. 1843. Praesidialia L 9 Redemptoristen 1834-58. Father Poeckl at times allowed his enthusiasm and personal zeal to blind him to the “political” reality of his situation. Several times in his priestly life, his personal enthusiasm and zeal put him into conflict with his Redemptorist colleagues or his fellow diocesan priests. As a recently ordained Redemptorist and Assistant to the Novice Master, in Eggenburg, Father Poeckl and a colleague provided for a gravely sick man of the town an opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By doing so, they were “invading” the jurisdiction of the local parish priest, whose obligation it was to attend to a gravely sick person. As a result, the local parish priest denounced them to the bishop. Fortunately, in the end, the local bishop commended Father Poeckl and his colleague for their zeal. Cf. *Redemptorist Chronica of Eggen-*

After the Diocesan Curia sent a copy of Father Pöckl's letter to Father Passerat, the Curia received Passerat's reply. On November 24, the Curia wrote to Pöckl that, in their opinion, he was bound by his Redemptorist vow of obedience and must accept his transfer to Innsbruck. Three days later, Father Pöckl left for Stíria, in the Diocese of Linz, on his way to Innsbruck. It was during his stay in Stiria that Father Pöckl wrote to Archbishop Milde in Vienna making an emotional appeal to be accepted as a diocesan priest. However, the Archdiocese of Vienna refused this appeal.<sup>14</sup>

From Stíria, Father Pöckl went on to the Redemptorist residence at Innsbruck where his very lively preaching style was a big success. One can read a comment of the Innsbruck Redemptorist chronicler: "Since his first sermon here in Innsbruck Father Pöckl has revealed his incomparable capacity for preaching in a popular and spontaneous style, which makes a strong impact on his listeners." He possessed a gift for holding people's attention and stirring their emotions.<sup>15</sup> His was a style which did not concur with the bland, insipid type of preaching demanded by the State government at that time and which was divorced from the real world. Needless to say, his style incurred the wrath of civil and ecclesiastical authorities who wanted the Catholic ministry to follow only approved patterns. He was therefore marked as a headstrong, somewhat disreputable individual.

In March, 1844, Father Pöckl returned to Stiria in the diocese of Linz, his native diocese. There, he lived at the Dominican Convent and wrote to the Diocesan Curia of Linz, asking permission to be incardinated into that diocese. After consulting the Redemptorists in Vienna, they gave the following answer to Father Pöckl:

Even though he may not [ultimately] receive definitive permission to join the diocese, he may have faculties in the diocese for a trial period of one or two years, before being officially incardinated into the diocese.<sup>16</sup>

---

burg, 1830-1833, 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Dez. 1843.

<sup>15</sup> AGHR, Prov. Austriaca, *Chronica et labores apostolici I*, (1820-1865), 258.

<sup>16</sup> D.A.W. – Ordinariatsakten, Redemptoristen II, Nr. 1191, 18 Mai 1844 e Nr. 3774, 26 Mai 1844.

### 6. – *First Rule of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters*

At this time, Barbara Maix was publicly trying to start her *Institute for Domestic Servants*. She continued to remain very quiet about any idea of founding a Religious Congregation, because of the opposition of the Government and the Archdiocese of Vienna. Her intention lay in the direction of a congregation of women religious oriented preferably toward social service. Such a group was an innovative notion, unfamiliar to both the civil and ecclesiastical establishments. During the winter of 1844, from Stíria Father Pöckl sent to Barbara several candidates for her emerging community. During this time also, Barbara had sent to the Imperial Court and to the Archdiocesan Curia a copy of her Rule of Life, seeking the official approval for this “Institute for Domestic Servants.” The Vicar General of the Diocese wrote the following opinion to the Imperial Government about Barbara’s request:

The Redemptorist Superiors themselves do not think that her request should be approved ... and that Father Pöckl is not a fitting Director for such a Religious Order ... and in fact, having been removed from Vienna by his Congregation, he is now living in Stíria.<sup>17</sup>

### 7. – *The Government’s Decision*

The Imperial Government was initially of the following opinion about Barbara’s request for its approval: *Since the Archdiocese and the local Police approved of her work in favor of the maid servants, the Imperial Government has also considered this to be a worthwhile undertaking. However, with regards to founding an Order of Sisters, the National Council has been absolutely against this; since the Church government also did not approve of this.*<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Nieder Österreichisches Landesarchiv. K.k. Allgemeine Hofammer. Wien I Herrengasse, 11, – C., 1845, Fasz 10, Nr. 4823, 29 Juni 1844, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 128-131.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 – Wien, C.9, Nr. 40657/4758, Juli 1844, Schwestern vom Herzem Maria, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 133.



The government's decree also made an interesting comment about Father Pöckl in a letter regarding this affair:

According to the reports, there must have been points of disagreement between the Order of the Redemptorists and Father Pöckl because he was considered the founder of this "*Institute for Maid Servants*," but he failed to communicate anything to the Redemptorists about this fact. In the spring of the current year, either with or without the knowledge and consent of his superiors, he left town and went to stay near his relatives in Upper Austria, and from what he have heard, he has left his Order.<sup>19</sup>

8. – *Another Decision of the Federal Government, October 9, 1844*

The Federal Government was collecting pertinent information on the case of Barbara and her embryonic Religious Congregation and handed down a decision on October 9, 1844. The person in charge of the official government session hearing the case was Bishop Reichel Talazko, a representative of the Church for the Government. A significant portion of his decision read:

With respect to the founding of a feminine Religious Order, which has its goal also the education of children, without having approved its capability for this, we should decide as completely opposed, since this particular Order is not approved by the Church, and the Rule of this Order also does not have Church approval. Also, it has no significant financial resources; and its sustenance seems so precarious, that there is no guarantee that it would be able to continue.<sup>20</sup>

9. – *Father Pöckl Dismissed*

While the Government discussing the case of Barbara, Father Pöckl was looking for a diocese which would accept him, since he had been dismissed by the Redemptorists. It was proba-

---

<sup>19</sup> Archiv für Niederösterreich. Wien I. Herrengasse, 11 – Karton 59, k.k., Polizei Ober-Dion, 1844, Nr. 3059, 30 Aug. 1844, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Nieder Österreichisches Landesarchiv. K.k. Allgemeine Hofkammer. Wien I. Herrengasse, 11 – C. 1844, Fasz. 9, Nr40657, 17 Juli 1844 e Nr. 56074, 28 Okt. 1844, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 147.

bly prior to October 18, 1844, that he received notification of his dismissal from Father Passerat, for Father Passerat had communicated with the General Government of the Redemptorists in Rome before that date:

Moreover, Father Pöckl, from a Viennese family, because of his radical way of preaching, but, especially, because of his fanaticism in the hearing of confessions, about which he had been warned many times, and yet did not change his ways; and because, in the end, he himself requested it, I have granted his request. This was done after everything was approved of by my Consultors, and after my decision that there was nothing which impeded my dismissal of this member.<sup>21</sup>

On October 21, Father Pöckl made his official request to be incardinated in the Diocese of Linz, writing from Stiria:

The undersigned humbly asks to be incardinated into this Diocese. As is stated on the attached baptismal certificate, he was born in 1796, and is now of advanced age; but, despite this, he has sufficient health that he can take on any type of pastoral assignment you might have. This is proven by the attached medical certificate from Doctor-Professor Schraf, who knew him for many years as a physician at the Redemptorist Convent in Vienna. He requests, for this reason, incardination in this diocese; and in exchange, promises to fulfill exactly, all the correct and wise determinations and desires of this diocesan Curia. He hopes that his request will be granted, especially since he is a native of this diocese. He is not guilty of any fault. He has worked untiringly in the dioceses of Leoben, Graz, S. Pölten and Vienna, working for the salvation of souls.

At each moment, the Redemptorists can confirm this; since not only they, but also the whole Church community, have placed in him their entire confidence. They chose him to be superior in Leoben, after being Novice Master; and finally as the official homilist for the Sunday masses in Vienna, and General Consultor for the Congregation, which office he fulfilled until he left the Redemptorists. More recently, he has been working in Stiria, as Associate Pastor, where he believes he has been behaving himself in a sincere way, worthy of recommendation, as a priest.

---

<sup>21</sup> AGHR, Passerat, *Epistolae ad Superiores Maiores*, Pars II, (1832-1848).

He communicates, finally, that he is attaching his letter of dismissal from the Superior of the Redemptorists; therefore, he no longer wears the Redemptorist habit, but dresses in the manner of the clergy of the diocese.<sup>22</sup>

However, the Curia refused to give Pöckl “permanent” status in the diocese, allowing him, however, to continue ministry on a temporary basis.<sup>23</sup>

10. – *The Government’s Decision For the Sisters; the Diocese of Linz Accepts Father Pöckl*

While Father Pöckl was struggling with his difficulties, Barbara Maix was still dealing with the Imperial Government regarding the approbation of her proposed religious community. At the end of January 1845 a summary of the official findings concerning her case was handed to the Emperor for his final decision. These summary conclusions indicated to the Emperor that there was nothing wrong with the work of promoting the well-being of maid servants, who could possibly fall into prostitution. However, with regards to founding a religious institute, the authorities repeated their earlier objections:

The Government of Lower Austria is absolutely against the founding of a new Religious Order, especially since it is not approved by the Church, and does not have sufficient financial resources to sustain itself.<sup>24</sup>

On February 18, 1845, Emperor Ferdinand signed the decree which ratified the findings of this Commission. From then on, the Police were instructed to watch and make sure that those whom Barbara had gathered around her did not go beyond their stated purpose of helping young women, and did not live as a religious community.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ordinariats Archiv. Linz. Harrachstrasse, 7 – CA/3, Sch. 22, Fasz. 1/7, 1846, 21 Okt., 1844.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv. Allgemeine. Verwaltungsarchiv. Alter Kultus. Wien III. Nottendorfergasse, 2 – Fasz 92, Nr. 6152/711, 6 Juni 1845, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 155.

After this decision Father Pöckl came to Vienna to lend his support to the group of women who stood with Barbara in this project. It is curious to note, however, that Father Pöckl drew negative attention to himself when he celebrated Mass in Vienna, already having left the Redemptorists, and living at that time with his probationary status from the Diocese of Linz, but having no official permission to function in the Diocese of Vienna from its Vicar General. This Vicar General had no liking for Father Pöckl and had ordered him to reside with the Redemptorists when in Vienna, and ask them for leave to celebrate Mass when in Vienna. But since Pöckl already had severed all ties with the Redemptorists, he chose to return to Stiria after just a few days.

In September 1845 he again wrote to the Diocese of Linz requesting incardination. At this time, the bishop, Grzegorz Tomasz Ziegler, was elderly and infirm. As a result, Father Pöckl's plea encountered a kind of administrative limbo.<sup>25</sup> The bishop's Consultors suggested that he apply for ministry in the Diocese of Regensburg where, comparably, there existed more of a need for priests than in the Diocese of Linz. After bureaucratic delays, the officials of the Diocese of Regensburg informed him that they had no place for him. At last, only in April 1847 did the Diocesan Curia of Linz appoint Pöckl as associate pastor in Obercasel. There he worked just several months, until July 6 of that year. Then, the Pastor in St. Thomas of Blasenstein, in the mountains, asked for a substitute, as he was worn out by the physical demands of his ministry in the harsh mountain climate. As of July 6, Father Pöckl was named Associate Pastor in Blasenstein, but ten months later he himself was worn out physically because of the mountain weather conditions.<sup>26</sup>

### 11. – 1848 – *The Revolution*

At this time the winds of revolution were sweeping across Europe. There was an entrenched resolution to do away with royal governments and, in their place, to introduce democracy. Since

---

<sup>25</sup> Ordinariats Archiv. Linz. Harrachstrase, 7 C/A 3, Sch, 22, Fasz. 1/7, 1846.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Juni, 1847.

the Catholic Church was so closely wedded to State governments, the fury of revolution was directed also against the Church.

In Vienna the waves of this angry revolution were given additional impetus by local economic conditions. After 1840 industry and commerce had experienced a severe downturn and the cost of living soared. The replacement of manpower by machines brought on increasing unemployment. By 1847 it was estimated that three thousand beggars roamed the city, homeless and hungry. The Government attempted to provide soup kitchens and breadlines.

There was also the virulent presence of Freemasonry which concentrated its anticlerical spirit especially on the Jesuits and Redemptorists. The latter, whose social apostolate was very visible, soon suffered from masonic rumors about their hoarding untold wealth. "Proof" of this was in the rich liturgical vestments and altar vessels in use at *Maria am Gestade*.

On the night of April 5, 1848, came a full-scale mob attack on the Redemptorist headquarters in Vienna. A government official read a decree that the Redemptorists were to be expelled from the city. The mobsters then proceeded to ransack both their residence and their famous church. By various means the priests and brothers were able to flee to safety. The aged Transalpine Vicar General, Father Joseph Passerat, eventually sought asylum in Belgium.<sup>27</sup> On April 6, two signs were posted outside the residence and church declaring that both were now "Property of the Government."

However, the revolutionaries wanted to wipe out every last trace of the Redemptorists in Vienna. On April 6 they expelled the "Redemptorist Sisters," who lived in a district of Vienna called Rennweg. The pastor of Rennweg later left a description of the expulsion of these "Redemptorist Sisters," saying that the National Guard arrived after dark with carriages to take them away, but the parking area for the carriages was behind the convent so as not to attract attention. The Sisters were taken outside the city and abandoned to their own destiny in the middle of the night. Then the National Guard thrashed and desecrated their convent.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> *O Documentario*, 200.

<sup>28</sup> Nieder Österreichisches Landesarchiv. K.k. Allgemeine Hofkammer.

### 12. – *Suppression of the Community of Barbara Maix*

Perhaps it was Father Pöckl's frequent prior visits which led to a "search for hidden Redemptorists" at the *Institute* of Barbara Maix on April 7, 1848. For, as a matter of fact, the local police chief conducted such a search, and on that day was able to report to his superiors:

We have not found any Redemptorists in Barbara Maix's residence in Wieden [a district of Vienna]. However, there is a Father Pöckl, who is an Associate Pastor in the Diocese of Linz.<sup>29</sup>

Also, it is known that near midday a crowd demonstrated outside the *Institute* and residence and was shouting threats. Maix and her companions ate a hurried lunch and then began leaving in small groups. Then before long the crowd grew in frenzy and made their move to invade, wanting to make sure that all of the occupants were expelled just as the Redemptorists and "Redemptorist Sisters" had been driven away.

Barbara and her companions temporarily sought refuge with friends and relatives in Vienna. The *Institute* and residence was officially suppressed by the police. The local police of the Wieden district sent the following report to their superior officer:

With regards to the suppression of the residence for maid-servants, N. 406, in Wieden, belonging to Barbara Maix: this was done due to our suspicion of its being one of the satellite installations of the *Liguorians* [Redemptorists].<sup>30</sup>

### 13. – *Father Pöckl and the Revolution*

When the Revolution broke out in Vienna, Father Pöckl was already convinced that he had to leave the austere mountain climate of Blasenstein. He had further decided that he would officially retire and attend to his health. Barbara Maix was urging him to come from the Diocese of Linz to Vienna in order to serve as chaplain for her community.

---

Wien I. Herrengasse, 11 – C. 9, Nr. 18656/1848, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 200.

<sup>29</sup> Archiv für Niederösterreich. Wien I. Herrengasse, 11 – Polizei Ober-Dion, Karton 59, Nr 2837, 7 April, 1848, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 201.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 April, 1848, as quoted in *O Documentario*, 205.

It was on the very day when the revolutionaries were attacking the Redemptorists in Vienna and were removing the “Redemptorist Sisters” from their convent in Rennweg that Pöckl packed his belongings and left Blasenstein. He traveled first to Linz to seek permission for travel to Vienna. Two days later he was able to present to the diocesan Curia in Linz his reasons for the journey: “The undersigned humbly asks permission to travel to Vienna for fourteen days, to treat some very urgent family business as soon as possible. His pastor [in Blasenstein] agrees with this request, and will take care of the parish during this period”. The presumption is that his “very urgent business” was to look after his daughter and to visit Barbara and her community. The Curia granted him permission to go to Vienna for two weeks, and to celebrate Mass wherever he wished.<sup>31</sup>

On March 15, 1843, a new constitution had been proclaimed and the National Guard was formed to guarantee that this constitution was implemented. Accordingly, a degree of calmness had settled over the city. It was in this atmosphere that Father Pöckl arrived in Vienna on March 16. When visiting the Curia of the Vienna archdiocese, he indicated his local address was the same as that of Barbara and her companions, and there he had a room isolated from their quarters. As a precaution against any sudden revolutionary uprising, he sent his daughter Susanna (by now a member of the Maix community) to stay with relatives in a rural area.

His next project was to begin official steps toward retirement from ministry. First he had his long-time personal physician document his condition:

I am witness to the fact that Father Pöckl, fifty-two years old, suffers from a chronic cough, which has been returning each winter worse than before. This results from his frequent preaching, and celebrating Masses, and, especially, from the many difficult travels which he has been forced to endure, while visiting the sick in his parish... It is absolutely necessary that Father Pöckl suspend his activities; otherwise he runs the risk of contracting incurable pneumonia.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ordinariates Archiv. Linz. Harrachstrasse, 7-CA/3, Sch. 352. Fasz. 33/6, 1848.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *Ibid.*, CA/3, Sch. 37, Fasz. 1/12, 1848.

Then the following day, April 4, he communicated this to the Diocesan Curia in Linz. As explained above, it was exactly on these days in April that the enraged populace expelled the Redemptorists from Vienna, and Barbara and her companions from their residence in another district of Vienna. In the midst of all this, as Pöckl pursued his retirement, rumors had been spread that a Redemptorist priest was housed in the residence of the Maix community. When the police hurried to verify the rumors, they discovered that Pöckl proved to be *not* a Redemptorist, but a diocesan priest from Linz.

The evidence is not clear as to where Father Pöckl went after the police raided and suppressed the residence of Barbara and her community. One possibility is that he left Vienna immediately to return to Linz, and perhaps together with some of the Maix community. This is reasonable, since he had permission for only a two-week leave of absence, and the documentation of his retirement was legally to be administered in Linz itself, his native place.

It is clear that on April 11, the Curia in Linz submitted the Pöckl retirement papers to the government offices in that city. Moreover, the Curia registered a favorable recommendation to the government for Pöckl, promoting his eligibility for a pension. Also, it is evident that on June 8 he received final approval for the pension, the total of 200 florins annually, to be paid in monthly installments, retroactive to April 1, 1848.<sup>33</sup>

#### 14. – *Official Suppression of the Religious Communities*

The anticlerical revolutionaries were not content with just expelling the Redemptorists. They worked hard to suppress definitively *all* religious communities in Austria. Actually, the Emperor, Ferdinand I, and his mother, Maria Theresa, were personal friends of the Redemptorists and were opposed to their suppression. In fact, they had already indicated they were very unhappy with the expulsion of the Redemptorists from Vienna. On May 7, the leaders of the revolution presented ten decrees to the Emperor, urgently requesting him to sign them all. They de-

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, SA/3, Sch. 111, Fasz. 6/19, 1848.



ceived Ferdinand by indicating the content of only *some of the less important* decrees. The Emperor quickly signed them all. Among these documents was hidden the decree which called for the suppression of the Redemptorists and the “Redemptorist Sisters” (as well as the Jesuits). Thus the government took over all the Redemptorist property in Austria. At the time, there were 140 professed Redemptorists in the country, of whom eighty-seven were priests.<sup>34</sup>

### 15. – *Looking Toward New Horizons*

Since the early 1840s, Barbara Maix and Father Pöckl had been looking for a more hospitable environment, where they could receive official approval for the nascent religious community. Father Pöckl, when he was still a Redemptorist, and afterwards, had maintained contact with certain Redemptorists who had gone off to the United States as missionaries. There were nine such who departed between 1844 and 1848 and with whom he had been stationed in Vienna.

On June 21, 1848, Father Pöckl himself came to a decisive moment regarding America. Although he was officially retired as a pensioner, he filed an artful petition with the Diocesan Curia in Linz to travel across the Atlantic. This petition read in part: “Since, according to the undersigned’s medical report, it would be advantageous to his health to undertake a sea voyage, he requests permission to travel to North America, where he wishes to become more familiar with the religious situation there. He also asks permission, if things work out, to stay some more time in America.” And the Curia acceded, giving him permission for the voyage.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Fr. Bortoluzzi mentions this suppression of the Redemptorists on p. 215 of his *Documentario* (Life of Blessed Barbara Maix). Cfr. Eduard HOSP, *Erbe des hl. Klemens Maria*, Wien 1953, 364-421. In 1848, the Redemptorists were established in Frohnleiten, Mautern, Innsbruck, Marburg, Eggenburg, and Leoben. Cfr. Id., *Akten aus dem Österreichischen Staatsarchiv in Wien, nebst anderen Dokumenten zur Aufhebung und Wiedereinführung der Kongregation in Österreich, 1848-1854*, in: *SHCSR* 7 (1959) 266-318.

<sup>35</sup> Ordinariates Archiv. Linz. Harrachstrasse, 7- CA/3, Sch. 352, Fasz. 33/6, 1848, 21 Juni 1848.

Barbara's community was also preparing for a trip to North America. By the previous May 31 two of the members had *already* acquired the necessary passports. It is possible that Father Pöckl was planning to precede the others in order to gather firsthand information. Or perhaps he just maintained a discreet silence to avoid any conflicts with the Curia in Linz. It is clear, however, that around this time, because of the political turmoil in Vienna, Barbara and her Sisters moved to Linz, where Father Pöckl was residing. There they would await further developments.

In August of 1848, Barbara, her companions, and Father Pöckl, travelled the nearly 600 miles north to Hamburg, Germany, to board a ship for America. Barbara preferred to travel on a cargo vessel, which, having few other passengers, would leave her and her companions more at ease to function as a community. After waiting for a month, no ship bound for America appeared in port.

Finally a cargo ship named *Merck* appeared. Barbara inquired of the captain if he was bound for America. His response was that his destination was Brazil and that he could take Barbara and her community as the only passengers. She accepted the offer and the departure for her and her twenty-two companions came on September 15, 1848. Father John Pöckl accompanied them, apparently with no further communication with the Diocesan Curia of Linz.

They arrived in Rio de Janeiro on November 9, fifty-two days later. As one of the Sisters commented in her diary, "We arrived in Rio de Janeiro, with no money, without knowing anyone, without knowing the language, and very hungry; but full of faith in God and our Blessed Mother."<sup>36</sup>

In Rio de Janeiro, Barbara and her companions, along with Father Pöckl, sought out and were warmly received by the local bishop, Manuel de Monte Rodrigues de Araújo. Soon they were in the process of becoming a bona fide congregation of women religious, fully recognized by the Church and the civil government as the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Their ministry was to focus on the education of young girls.

---

<sup>36</sup> *O Documentario*, 245.

Within two years, in 1850, Father Pöckl fell victim to an epidemic of yellow fever. His death, which occurred in Rio de Janeiro, was a great loss to the community whose foundation he firmly believed to be the Will of God. However, under the direction of Barbara Maix they continued their mission in Brazil. Eventually, at the request of the bishop of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, she moved the community to that diocese where they flourished.

Today, the Motherhouse of these Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, but they serve throughout Brazil as well as in Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela, Italy, Bolivia, Haiti, the United States, and also in various sites in Africa. Presently, they number over 850 Sisters under the leadership of Sister Marlise Hendges. Their vision is to be faithful to the original dream of Blessed Barbara Maix by their service in schools, hospitals, health care, and social outreach – always with great attention to the most needy.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the Redemptorist priests and brothers developed foundations in Brazil, although invitations to do so had come some decades earlier.<sup>37</sup> When they did thrive in Brazil, however, it was often in collaboration with the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters founded by Blessed Barbara Maix. With her Sisters the Redemptorists have rejoiced to celebrate her Beatification and to pray with them in anticipation of the day when she may be proclaimed saint of the Church.

#### *Acknowledgements*

The author of this article acknowledges the scholarly work of Father Octávio Cirillo Bortoluzzi. While the latter was studying for his doctorate in history in Rome, and thereafter, he pursued extensive research on Blessed Barbara Maix. From 1955 until 1974 Bortoluzzi sifted through documents preserved in various libraries, as well as in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Vienna, the Archives of the Redemptorists' Vienna Province, the

---

<sup>37</sup> See BOLAND, S. J. *A Dictionary of the Redemptorists*, s.v. Brazil, 50.

Redemptorist General Archives in Rome, the Archives of the Imperial Court of Austria, the Austrian Police Archives, and also in the Redemptorist and governmental archives in Brazil. His resultant Maix biography has served as a foundational source for this current study of the life of Barbara Maix.

The author of this article is also grateful to the research assistants who aided him in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Vienna and the Diocese of Linz; their cheerful and attentive help in locating documents related to the Redemptorists was invaluable. The same gratitude extends to his confreres in the Redemptorist Historical Institute at their Generalate in Rome, and to Father Lorenz Voith and other Redemptorists of the “*Maria am Gestade*” Community in Vienna; both their hospitality and assistance were much appreciated.

Finally, he must give very sincere thanks to Pastor Holger Roggelin of Zion Lutheran Church in Baltimore, and to Roland and Miriam Schleck of Salisbury, Maryland; these friends provided tireless dedication in transcribing many pages of “Old German Script” into modern German orthography.

Recognition is likewise given here to the former Superior General of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters, Sister Maria Zení, of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. It was she who provided the author of this article with a personal copy of the Barbara Maix biography mentioned above. Sister Zení thus sparked further interest in the life of Blessed Barbara Maix, and especially in the details of Redemptorist history interwoven in Maix’ life.