

# A Life of Love and Service

## Sr Marie-Therese Noblet AD

### Sr Genevieve de Massignac AD

[It seems some text was missing from the start of this article in the original printed version. This missing text includes references to endnotes <sup>1</sup> and <sup>2</sup>, which are shown at the end of this article. –Revising ed.]

This humble study will be mostly based on the following sources:

- the *Notes* Mother Marie-Therese wrote herself, around 1906, about her miraculous cure at Lourdes, in 1905;
- those she wrote in Papua in 1925, on the request of Bishop de Boismenu,<sup>3</sup> about her childhood and her youth;
- the *Notes* Bishop de Boismenu wrote, almost day by day, between 1921 and 1930, as he followed Mother Marie-Therese's spiritual life and her mystic experiences;<sup>4</sup>
- and the *Souvenirs*, which he wrote, on the request of his niece, Mother Solange Bazin de Jessey, who succeeded Mother Marie-Therese as Superior of the Handmaids, from 1932 to 1942.
- We will also refer to the biography, written by Father A. Pineau MSC, who was a chaplain at Kubuna, (Diocese of Bereina, now), then the Mother-House of the Handmaids of Our Lord, where Mother Marie-Therese lived, died, and is buried.<sup>5</sup>

### Introduction

It will be, indeed, very difficult to describe such a rich personality, or recount in a few pages, such an eventful life, as that of Mother Marie-Therese Noblet. We will only be able to mention a few episodes, and some aspects of her saintly character, and of her spiritual life, trying to let her speak herself, and to see what others have written about her.

Before we begin our “journey” into her life, it may be good to prepare, ourselves to face the sort of life she led.

Throughout the history of the church, we find individual people, or groups, who have been called to a special vocation or mission, and who have rendered more visible the life and love of God in men, and, through them, in the world, and for the world.

Such were the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints, etc., a huge “epic” of love: born of the love of God, they lived in love, and radiated love.

Our own time is not deprived of such people: Father Maximilien Kolbe, who died a martyr during the Second World War, our contemporaries, John Paul II and Mother Therese, and others. Mother Marie-Therese was a follower, and a lover, of Christ, of that calibre. While her exterior life was ordinary, though radiant with love and peace, her interior life was enriched by extraordinary graces, which were purposely hidden by God, to all, except for a few priests, who were the only privileged witnesses of these “marvels of God”<sup>6</sup> in her soul.

It might not be useless to also mention that, because the Catholic church has only been in Australia for two centuries, there has not been any such “cases” – at least, publicly known – in this end of the world. This might render the concepts, we will consider, and even the vocabulary we will have to use, a little difficult, or strange, to some readers, especially to those who may not be quite familiar with the Catholic tradition.

It is evident that, without an attitude of faith, the facts, we will recall, would appear as madness. On the contrary, seen and appreciated with eyes of faith, and hearts full of a desire to be filled with whatever God has in store for those who believe in His work in “the little ones”,<sup>7</sup> the simple daily life of Mother Marie-Therese brings us closer to the One, who was the source of the holiness of her life.

We will follow the “itinerary” proposed, in a few words, by Father A. Pineau, in his *Biography of Mother Marie-Therese*, already mentioned:

Born in 1889, Mother Marie-Therese had her first great illness at the beginning of her eighth year; eight years later, in 1905, she was miraculously cured at Lourdes; eight years later, in 1913, she received the call to the life of a victim. Again, a portion of eight years, and, in

1921, she was leaving for Papua, to suffer there, for another eight years, until her death in 1930.<sup>8</sup>

As Archbishop de Boismenu wrote in the *Souvenirs*, gathered spontaneously for his “daughters”, the Handmaids of Our Lord:

To fix your eyes on her, to call in mind what she has been, what she has said, what she has done, will do more than a 100 discourses, to draw you all after her to the love and to the service of God. . . . If He poured out His favours on her, it is because she poured out her love on Him, a love so generous that she never refused Him anything. It is this great service of love that can be imitated in her admirable life. No doubt ours is a more modest programme. It is made to our measure. It will sanctify us if we really do our best to fulfil it, as Mother Marie-Therese did hers.”<sup>9</sup>

### **1. As a Child, She Early Discovered the “Life After Life” (1889-1896)**

Our story begins, a 100 years ago, far away from Papua New Guinea, in Signy, a quiet little town in the forest country of Ardennes, in Eastern France. This is where Marie-Therese Noblet’s grandfather had established a prosperous spinning mill in 1815, and where her father, Charles Noblet, had set up his home, in order to carry on his father’s work.

Marie-Therese was born on September 30, 1889, the second of three children:<sup>10</sup>

“I was born as happy as one can be on earth. The good Lord had placed me into the hands of good and virtuous parents. My father had a spinning mill and a large house at Signy; this is where I was born. I had a brother, one year older than me; his name was Louis, and, younger than me, I had a little sister called Madeleine. Mama was beautiful, and, above all, very kind. Papa, too, was very kind and charitable. He had founded an orphanage near the spinning mill, and he had about 30 little orphans, brought up by the five sisters of Saint Chretienne.<sup>11</sup> Papa and Mama lived very happy, during seven or eight years. At Signy, for us children, it was perfect happiness.”

Marie-Therese was five when clouds appeared on this clear familial sky. In 1894, a general slump in business resulted in the spinning mill

working at a loss. Mr Noblet fought to save his business and keep his workers.

“Then, Papa fell sick, and died after only a few months. (23.9.1894) Mama was left alone, with three little children, my brother was hardly six years old. . . . My poor little Mama, very courageous, got a fatal shock, because, with the death of our father, material downfall was to be added to the painful separation, and everything had to be sold at Signy: properties, houses, spinning mill. All was bought by my Uncle Palle, at a very low price.<sup>12</sup>

“Mama left for Reims with her three little children. At my maternal grandparents’ home, we were welcomed with open arms. My grandfather had replaced his father as a professor at the medical school, and had also carried on his private practice. . . . My grandparents settled my mother in a flat, which had been comfortably fitted out for her.”<sup>13</sup>

October was the reopening of school, after the summer holidays.

“It was then, as a day pupil at the school of the infant Jesus; I was going back home to take my meals.

“A few months later, my little sister, Madeleine, died suddenly (February 1895), as a result of capillary bronchitis, and, in January, the good Lord took Mama also: to a great extent, she died of sorrow (3.1.1896).

“When my mother died, I felt it more, because I understood better. When my father died, I had the idea that he was going for a long trip, and that, after a while, he would come back. But, for my mother, I understood, and I suffered more. I was then six years of age.

“My grandmother, then, fell more seriously ill from her heart disease, and, the following November, it was finished for her, too.<sup>14</sup>

“When I lost my grandmother, whom I loved dearly, I felt really unhappy. I could not complain, because I could see my grandfather was very lonely; but, at the bottom, right at the bottom, of my heart, it was as if I was losing my second mother.

“Then, I was put in boarding school full-time. I was going, every Sunday, to see my grandfather, who was bringing me to see Louis, at the college of the Jesuits.”

Then Marie-Therese admits: “All these successive blows had deeply shaken me.” It is no wonder that, one month later, she felt sick.

On Christmas day, after the family gathering, Marie-Therese went back to the boarding school.

“That night, I began to vomit so terribly and painfully that I was carried to the infirmary. Grandpa was notified, as soon as possible, the next morning. It was very serious: peritonitis.<sup>15</sup>

“The three doctors, who came to see me, many times a day, found me on the verge of death. An operation was suggested, but it had little chance of succeeding, and grandpa answered that he would rather see me return peacefully to God than see me die during the operation.

“He asked the chaplain to give me the last sacrament. . . . It was a beautiful ceremony: all the sisters, holding lighted candles, were following the priest, who was very moved. I had been told: ‘little Jesus will come to get you’, and I understood very well that we should be in a feast-day mood to welcome the dear little Jesus, and I was very happy! I was waiting impatiently for His coming . . . but little Jesus did not come!

“A novena to our Lady of Seven Dolors was started to obtain my cure . . . and, behold, the last day of the novena, when they were giving up hope of saving me, the abscess broke out, of itself, in the outside. It was quite unexpected, and providential: I was saved! The Blessed Virgin already wanted to show herself my mother, and she was already saving me from certain death.”

Though she was miraculously cured, Marie-Therese was in the infirmary for a few months, and was sent to the country, where fresh air and sun brought her back to good health. This gave the nine-year-old girl plenty of time to think of all her beloved, who had gone “home” to God, to become very familiar with the thought of heaven, and, more mature than others, in

regard to the aim of our life. She was already finding consolation and peace in the invisible world.

## **2. As a Girl, She Learned to Suffer (1897-1905)**

“At the reopening of the school, in October, 1896, the sisters were a bit reluctant to take me back on account of my health, but, at last, they made up their mind and I went back as a boarder, at the same time with the others.

“From 1897 to 1900, nothing special happened in my life: I was at school, and the holidays were spent between our two families in turn.<sup>16</sup>

These were three quiet years, during which she was happy at school! Her school friends, who were still alive in the 1970s, remembered her vividly as a frail young girl, very quiet, gentle, and always smiling. They were specially impressed by her beautiful, great, blue eyes, and the intensity of her attention during the catechism lessons, when the subject would bring to her mind God and heaven.

But another sorrow was soon to increase her solitude: on August 23, 1900, her good grandfather, Doctor Panis, died.

“This separation was another cruel wound, because it recalled all the others. We had placed all our affections on our poor grandfather. We can say that our dear Lord was taking them one after the other, probably so that we may be more His, only. . . .

“After the death of grandpa, the board of guardians met, and were put under the guardianship of my Uncle Bur, of Epernay. They were perfect for us: as father and mother as possible, treating us as their own children. May the good Master bless them abundantly.”

The following October,<sup>17</sup> Marie-Therese continued her boarding-school life in Reims, though Epernay, where her uncle and aunt lived, became “home” for her. She was 11 years old, and, by then, the Lord had stepped dramatically into her life so often that it would seem almost natural that she would live, in mind, heart, and soul, where her dear ones were, near the Lord, in His Father’s house.<sup>18</sup> And we are not surprised to read in her *Notes*:

I made my first communion on May 22, 1901; on that day I gave myself to our good Jesus forever.<sup>19</sup>

Her choice was made: He had not called her to Himself in death, but she was ready to answer His call, if it was His will to live in His love.

Each painful departure had brought home, in her heart, the reality of the “One”, who was calling all the members of her dear family, in turn, and the long hours of reflection, due to her periods of sickness and rest, had brought her to turn her love towards the “good Jesus” of her childhood, and to envisage spending her life with Him, and for Him, who had, so often, been her consolation, and had given her strength to go on living . . . with a peaceful smile.

“The years passed, I loved my boarding-school, my teachers, my companions. Unfortunately (humanly speaking!), I was not strong. I had continual headaches, though I had a very joyful disposition, I was often living with our dear ones: when I was filled with sadness, the chapel, and music, were of comfort to me.”

We cannot go into details about what happened during the months that followed. Turning the pages of both note-books, we see Marie-Therese, every year, “staying in bed for some time”, and finally, in December, 1903, going back to Epernay, to her Uncle Bur’s home, never to return to school.

During the following year – 1904 – she was often sick, and treated in various places. In May, we find her on the seashore, in Western France, with a cousin and his family, with whom she had accepted to take a rest.

“In January (1905), I had violent pains in my back, which could not be calmed by any treatment.” After a few days, they had to decide to bring her back to Paris for a medical consultation.

After a tiring trip, “I was brought straight away to the private hospital of Doctor Chipault (a great specialist), and, the next morning I was put in a plaster cast.”

In her first account, whose subject was her cure at Lourdes, she goes into many details of these painful months of treatment, of the anxious deliberations as to what best treatment could be found to help her, and of the

exquisite kindness of her family and friends, when she spent many months in bed, at Epernay.

A severe winter passed and spring came. “Finally, in May, the doctor declared that I needed open air. My uncle decided, then, to put me at Avenay.” There was, in that village, situated on the railway line, a quarter of an hour from Epernay, a beautiful property used for retired persons, where she was admitted by the Superior, in spite of her young age, because the Sister knew the Bur family, and was happy to render them a service.

“The religious, who ran the house, were Sisters of the Holy Saviour, an Alsatian order. And, it happened, that the good parish priest of the village knew my paternal family very well, as he was from Civet” (a small town, close to Signy). Again, let us turn a few pages about her life there. “The dear parish-priest could not have been more devoted to me, and, after a while, he took it into his head to bring me to Lourdes. When father talked to me about it, as it had always been my great desire to go to Lourdes, imagine how overjoyed I was!”

In the account of her miraculous cure, written soon after, she devotes 14 pages to the eventful trip to Lourdes, in the special train of the yearly “pilgrimage” of the diocese of Reims. Two facts come out clearly. Firstly, we see Marie-Therese suffering intensely, but always thinking of others, and offering her pains, discomfort, and anxieties for the fellow- travellers, who, like her, were suffering on stretchers, day and night, during the three days’ journey, which brought them also on pilgrimage to the village of the Curé of Ars.

Then, through vivid, and sometimes slightly mischievous, details, we cannot but see the fatherly love of Father Dieudonne – the parish-priest of Avenay – expressed in rather fussy, and often rough, ways and remarks, full of good intentions.

The train of pilgrims finally arrived at Lourdes on 31 August, in the morning. Her uncle, Mr Bur, her brother, Louis, and a Sister from Avenay, Sr Rene, had accompanied Marie-Therese on this memorable pilgrimage.

Before leaving Avenay, Marie-Therese had had a small opening made in her plaster. “Just at the place, which was attacked by the disease, a large



red spot could be seen on the vertebrae”, and the doctor had said to her, “we did all what we could do, now, it is up to the Blessed Virgin to do the rest.”

As she lay down on a bed of a ward of the hospital of the Immaculate Conception, her one desire was to go and “see” the famous grotto. But, “totally exhausted, on my bed, I humbly required to be allowed to rest until the next day. They promised me to do so.

“And I do not know through which misunderstanding the stretcher-bearers brought me to the grotto, in the afternoon. When I arrived there, I saw the statue of the Virgin, beaming with beauty and kindness. Then, I lost consciousness, and I did not see anything anymore.”

She attended the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, and showed such signs of deep exhaustion, that they rushed her back to the hospital.

“When we arrived in front of the hospital . . . I do not know what happened to me! Suddenly, I did not feel any more pain, and a sweet and strong voice was telling me: ‘Get up! You can walk.’”

“Grabbing my blanket, I called out: ‘Father! I am cured!’ I could still hear the sweet voice telling me to get up. But, with a rough voice, Father said, ‘Stop talking! You do not know what you are saying!’ ‘But, Father, I assure you, I am cured!’ ‘Hold your tongue, you are mad. It is not here that the holy virgin works miracles!’”

“We were just at the gate, at the entrance of the hospital. The stretcher-bearers had stopped. They had believed straight away.”

“The next day, I was brought to the office, where miracles are studied”, and the long examinations took place, which Marie-Therese describes in five pages!

Her account is shorter in her 1925 story: “They broke the cast: I was cured! I can still hear Doctor Boissarie<sup>20</sup> whisper: ‘The Holy Virgin picks them young!’”

To cut our story short, the judgment of the church was published on July 30, 1908, in Reims, and signed in Rome on February 11, 1908, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, by Cardinal Lucon.

“The cure of Miss Marie-Therese Noblet, which occurred at Lourdes, on August 31, 1905, is miraculous.”

Of course, the return trip to Reims, and the triumphal welcome, were to be unforgettable souvenirs for the grateful young girl, who had learned to suffer, and experienced the wonderful love of her beloved Mother Mary, who had confirmed her special care – we could almost say “plan” – for her. After this tiring experience, Marie-Therese went back to finish her convalescence among her dear old friends at Avenay.

### **3. As a Young Woman, Marie-Therese Begins to Receive Supernatural Favours (1905-1914)<sup>21</sup>**

“I was almost 17 when I went back to Epernay, where my family was anxiously waiting for me. I loved my aunt very much, and I had an easy life. It was a happy family life. I was actively involved in a club for young girls, and the meetings of the sodality of the Children of Mary, the singing practice at the parish, were taking a lot of my time.”

From 1906 to 1910, Marie-Therese led the normal life of a young woman of her age, between her family, her friends, her parish activities, and her social life. She was appreciated as a friend, and loved to help others, or to visit sick people in the hospital, and old people, lonely in their homes.

As she became more mature, and more conscious of what had happened to her during her childhood, and her early youth, she realised how, through her various sufferings of body, heart, and soul, which had been the source of great graces, she had become more and more aware of God’s love for her, and of her wish to give herself to Him. It must have been at that time that she made a private first step towards a consecrated life. In her notes, she mentioned it, in brackets, in 1910, when she settled at Signy, in what she thought was to be her vocation: “I had made a temporary vow of virginity for two years.”

It was also in 1908 that she received, again, a special grace at Lourdes, “where I used to go back about every other year. When I was about 19, I had a painful appendicitis, which our sweet mother cured again at Lourdes.”

Then, the “good Lord” – as she often called Him – really tried her vocation. He gave her the opportunity to meet a fine officer, who was in a regiment at Epernay, and who became very fond of her. He wanted to marry her. Marie-Therese loved him, too, but she loved her divine master still more, and she decided to be faithful to her word, and keep her whole heart for Him. Though, realising how hard it would be for her suitor, she told him of her resolve to break off all relations with him. Little did she know then that, more than ten years later, in her little convent in Papua, God would allow her, in the middle of a mystical experience, during the night of May 8, 1922, to find herself kneeling at the bed of this young man, and to pray for him, as he was dying in a place, which she could not identify. Bishop de Boismenu, in his notes, written at that time, after relating this incident, adds: “she then felt a great strength in her heart, and offered his soul to God.”<sup>22</sup>

This decision, against the eventuality of living as a good Christian wife and mother, brought her to a point, where she had to make a decision about her future.

“I was getting close to my 21st birthday and, all around me, knew that I wanted to consecrate myself to God. Marie<sup>23</sup> wanted very badly to see me start an institution in Signy, a little sister of hers. It would be supported, to a great extent, by the Paris house. I was hesitating. . . . I would have preferred to be truly religious.”

On the other hand, she had knocked at a nearby convent, where her family was well known, and had been told that she would never be strong enough to follow the rhythm of religious life, and share the work of the sisters.

Her cousin, Marie Palle, whom she had met mostly during the holidays at Signy, at their grandmother’s home, was ten years older than Marie-Therese. She lived a consecrated life as a lay-teacher, and devoted herself whole-heartedly to an institution of education for girls, at Neuilly, near Paris, and thought the same type of work would suit her young cousin, especially in the quiet environment of their dear Signy.

Eventually, after asking advice, Marie-Therese decided to grant her cousin’s desire, and began organising her future life.

“During the holidays (August-September, 1911), we looked for a little house to be rented in Signy,<sup>24</sup> and I had my furniture brought from Epernay. My uncle and my aunt of Epernay asked Madame Lundy (a secularised religious) to come with me as a lady-companion. . . . The parting from Epernay was very painful.

“At Signy, happy to be at home, and to live only for God, I gave myself wholeheartedly to my new life. How fond I was of my poor little girls.”

We cannot go into details about these happy first steps in Marie-Therese’s life of service and devotedness. Let us only notice that, in the margin of the exercise-book, as if it was not important, Marie-Therese added: “it was at Signy, in 1911, that the o. (“old one”, one of the names Mother Marie-Therese used to give to her to her enemy, the devil) began to tease me, tying me by the hair, so that I could not sleep in the night, throwing things into confusion in my room.” This was written in 1925, in her notes, when she was familiar with “him”; but, at that early stage of her life for God, she did not yet identify the author of these disturbances.

Here, we see the first episode of the extraordinary side of Mother Marie-Therese’s life. In order to begin trying to follow her on this mysterious way, let us see how Archbishop de BoisMENU explained to the Handmaids of Our Lord – many years later – why the devil, Satan,<sup>25</sup> stepped into the life of their Mother.

“These evil spirits infest our earth. They roam about everywhere, seeking to do us harm. They are jealous of our souls, which are destined for the heaven they have lost. They are trying their hardest to steal them away from God, to populate their hell, and share their torments. They want to make us fall into sin, in the hope that death may come and snatch us away in that state.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of these troubles, she continued her charitable work, and even considered the possibility of opening a primary school. She gave herself completely to her people; her generosity was going to be an outstanding aspect of her personality. But this happy life was not to last long.

“In January, 1912, I caught a chill, and soon after, pleurisy broke out. This time, I was completely bed-ridden, and for months, when the fine

weather came back, the doctor insisted on my going back to live in my grandmother's house, where I would be able to enjoy the garden."

In May, she was not yet very strong, when another sorrow fell on her. "At this date, I received news that my grandmother (Noblet) was seriously ill, and a few days later, a telegram brought me the news of her death." This was the occasion of a sad reunion with her brother, and her family, who came to Signy for the funeral.

The following month, they were gathered in the dear old family home again for a happier circumstance: "The wedding of my brother was decided for August 12."

This family event has to be mentioned, because it was going to be a milestone in Marie-Therese's life. She continues: "At Marie's request, Father Cordonnier accepted to bless the marriage. We were in a time of deep mourning, so the ceremony took place in the strictest privacy. They brought me to the church in a carriage, and I was able to attend the mass."

Father Cordonnier was a priest of the parish of Neuilly, near Paris, where Marie-Therese's cousin, Marie Palle, lived, in the institution we have already mentioned. He happened to be well acquainted with the spiritual way of life called "victim", lived by persons, who accepted to consecrate themselves to God, and to offer their prayers, their sufferings, and their whole self, for the salvation of souls.<sup>27</sup>

Seeing Marie-Therese so courageous and peacefully generous in her poor physical condition, and in her sad familial situation, he was inspired to suggest to her to use this "texture" of her life to make it her way of consecration to God.

"It is during this short stay at Signy that Father Cordonnier often came to see me, and talked at length about 'reparation',<sup>28</sup> and he did not come once, without my welcoming him with abundant tears. I could see where he wanted to lead me. I ought to be a victim, and my whole being rebelled against it. I could only see a bed of suffering, when I was dreaming of a life of active devotedness."

We cannot go into the details of the months, which followed this first step. Marie-Therese had to give up her dear work at Signy, and her beloved

people – to the great sorrow of all those who loved her, and appreciated her help so much – and she spent the following months at Neuilly, with her cousin Marie.

“Leaving Signy was a great sorrow for me. I think nobody noticed it, and, at the bottom of my heart, I was happy to offer this great sacrifice to the good Master.

“At Neuilly, it was evident that the ‘old one’ (the devil) was acting, and I had the sufferings of body, heart, and soul that I expected. Marie and I really believed that he ‘rented’ a room on the same floor, where I was staying.”

Of special interest, is a happening, which she mentions only briefly:

“Towards the middle of the year, the sickness took an alarming turn, and the doctors, who were anxious, decided on an operation. Just in time, our Holy Father Pope Pius X cured me, through a little piece of his cassock.<sup>29</sup> For this, I keep a very great gratitude to him. Father Meyer had sent us this relic.”

Father Meyer was, at the time, Superior General of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart – whose missionaries, priests, and brothers, had been in Papua since 1885. He was residing in Rome. He had been corresponding with Marie-Therese since she was eight years of age. She had most probably known him through the *Annales of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, a periodical, which Marie-Therese must have read regularly. This spiritual “link” with Father Meyer was to have capital importance in her life.

On the whole, the first half of 1913 could be considered as a period of initiation to her new life for Marie-Therese. Father Cordonnier was to be her spiritual director, until she left for Papua New Guinea with Bishop de Boismenu.

Then came the real “call”!

“I spent these last holidays of 1913 at Signy and Epernay.

“It is at Signy, while I was praying in front of my crucifix,<sup>30</sup> that the good Master clearly asked me if I wanted to really become His little

victim, and I answered, with all my heart, and with all my soul: “*ecce ancilla domini*”.<sup>31</sup> It was done. At that very instant, as if our beloved wanted to prove that He, too, accepted His little one, I felt a violent stab in my heart. During the afternoon, I had a spitting of blood, and a big red cross appeared clearly on my side, over the heart. It was on the first Friday of August or September, 1913. I was bearing the sacred insignia. There was nothing more for me to do but to go on and thank God for having been chosen.”

The extraordinary event, which took place at Signy, that Friday, was similar to the very famous episode in the life of St Francis of Assisi, when Christ appeared to him, suffering on the cross, and allowed rays of light to come from each of His five precious wounds and imprint on the same parts of his body bleeding wounds. Other saints had smaller bleeding marks of the same character. These “*stigmata*”, as they are called, are a seal of Jesus Christ, a sign that He has seized the one, who has accepted to share His passion, and given him or her what Marie-Therese would call her “*assurances*” – we could say “*proofs*” – that He loves them in a very special way, and will, henceforth, share His infinite love for men with them.

Little did Marie-Therese realise what this memorable, and deeply moving, and painful experience would mean for her, and eventually bring in her life. But, like Our Lady at Nazareth, without hesitation, and with a heart full of love, she answered a “*yes*”, her “*ecce*”, expressing her full consent to the will and the programme of God for her.

Without insisting on this souvenir, Marie-Therese passes on, directly, to one of the consequences of this divine call: her considering, once more, to join a Congregation of Sisters, and choose the religious life.

“Followed closely by Father Cordonnier, the divine happenings, and the others,<sup>32</sup> became more frequent. We seriously considered my joining the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>33</sup>

But, once more, the risen and suffering Christ, who had manifestly chosen her for His “*spouse*”, did not want her in a convent, at least, not in the one Father Cordonnier was regularly serving as a chaplain.

The end of 1913, and the first half of 1914, were, for Marie-Therese, a time of discernment, of abandonment: in patience and trust, to the love of the

One who, in His own good time, would show her where He wanted her to love Him, and to serve His church.

There were many more days, with various supernatural experiences, and even more trips with Father Cordonnier, to places in France, to envisage religious life in different convents and monasteries. They went to Nevers, where Sainte Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes had spent her saintly life, to Paray-le-Monial, on the steps of Saint Marguerit-Marie Alacocque. In none of these places did Marie-Therese hear the final, decisive call of God.

It was through unexpected, sad events, due to the First World War, that Marie-Therese was to find her way to her destiny.

She was at Signy for the yearly, summer holidays with her family, when France was invaded by the Germans, at the beginning of August, 1914, and soon the inhabitants of Signy had to leave their village, because of the rapid approach of the German soldiers, and their redoubtable shells. It was an "exodus" by a bereaved population. Marie-Therese, and her family, had nothing else to do but to follow the crowd, for safety's sake. But, after passing through Paris, Mr and Madame Palle, their daughter, Marie, and their niece, Marie-Therese, arrived at Issoudun, the birth-place of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. As we know, the two cousins had kept in touch, through the years, with Father Meyer, their Superior General, who was residing in Rome.

"We found a house to rent. Then Marie wrote to Father Meyer, to tell him about our exodus. Father Meyer answered very quickly. As kind as ever, he offered us the house of a priest, one of his councillors, adding that it was situated in the south of France, and we could stay there until the end of the war."

Father Jullien, who, as a councillor, was also living in Rome, being the only child of his parents, who lived near Marseille, had inherited their home, which would eventually belong to his Congregation.

"My uncle and my aunt decided to accept. We left for Marseille."

The family soon settled at "La Betheline", a three-storeyed house, situated in open country, close to the small town of Chateau-Gombert.



Marie and Marie-Therese soon fell in love with it, and with its beautiful surroundings. The family appreciated the mildness of the climate of Provence – well known for its beautiful coast of the Mediterranean Sea – and recovered from the emotions and fatigue of their ordeal. It was a period of sad events, and heart-breaking news: the invasion of Signy, and its countryside, the bombardment of the beautiful cathedral of Reims, and, above all, the great Marne Battle, which, though a victory, would be remembered as one of the most-costly battles in French history, as far as young human lives were concerned.

As Marie-Therese puts it in her *Notes*: “We settled down, with the idea that it would be only for a few months, because everyone firmly hoped, at that time, that the war would be finished soon.”

Marie-Therese, who had been reasonably well since their departure from Signy, was a source of comfort and courage for all: her kindness, her generosity, and courage, and her joyful smile, in spite of her poor health, were the consolation of her family.

She continues: “In February (1915), Father Andrew arrived from Rome to put himself at the disposal of the Bishop of Marseille. We were shocked to see him.”

Little did she know that Father Andrew Jullien would bring her to her final vocation! But it would take her another six years to find it!

#### **4. As an Invalid, Marie-Therese Finds Her Unexpected Vocation**

The Bishop of Marseille, who had many of his priests on the battlefields, had asked Father Meyer – the Superior General of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who was at Rome- to lend Father Jullien to his native diocese for the time of Lent and Easter. He placed “Father Andrew”, as he was known in the Mission, in a parish, situated 30 kilometres from “La Betheline”.

“Appointed to a village near Marseille, he was able to come and visit us from time to time. He had become our director, he was so devoted ... But he was called back to Rome after a certain time, and was supposed to come back if the war was to last”, says Marie-Therese, in her *Notes*.

The improvement in Marie-Therese's health was not to last!

"In June, 1915, as I was trying to open the door of the house, I fell backward. A few days later, I had to stay in bed. It was on the day of the Feast of the Sacred Heart. I stayed, lying down for many months, in the large bedroom of the third floor."

As a consequence of this fall, her spine was so badly damaged, that she was almost completely bed-ridden for the following five years, with pains, paralysis, and a heart attack, which the doctors could not cure.

Marie-Therese knew that this was the programme our Lord had for her and she accepted it, with all her heart. She was patient and generous, completely abandoned into God's hands. She was, without the knowledge of her family and friends – except her cousin, Marie – continuing her double life: one, as a patient, interested in others, and ready to enjoy a joke; the other, at the same time, as lover of Christ, sometimes lost in His intimacy, sometimes at the mercy of the devil. But her secret was well kept, according to God's will. She received encouragement from Father Cordonnier, from Paris, and from Father Jullien, from Rome.

Soon, God had pity on His generous "worker", and her devoted cousin. He inspired the Bishop of Marseille to call Father Jullien back again, this time to take charge of Chateau-Gombert, which was at a walking distance from "La Betheline", and, as there was no other residence of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Marseille, Father Meyer told Father Jullien to settle in his own, old home, with the "refugees". This is how he became so intimately involved in Marie-Therese's spiritual life. She notes: "Father Andrew had become our spiritual director, he was so devoted!" And, about herself, she only drops a gentle hint: "Since our arrival at "La Betheline", the supernatural happenings had occurred almost daily."

Father Jullien, indeed, was a true "missionary". He had left his heart in Papua. He had arrived at Yule Island in 1894, only nine years after Father Vedus had celebrated the first mass on Papuan soil. The next year, he had become Superior of the Mission, becoming one of its first pioneers. Anxious to bring the gospel to the people of the mainland, and especially to the thousands living in the beautiful mountains he could admire from the coast, he had organised three long expeditions: in 1894, 1896, and 1898, going right up to explore the unknown ridges and valleys of the Kuni and the

Fuyughe tribes. The latest expedition had been done with the newly-arrived Father Alan de Boismenu. It had been an unforgettable experience, where they had narrowly escaped death.

Then, from 1900 to 1909, Father Jullien had been the closest adviser and helper of Bishop de Boismenu, until he had been called to reside in Rome as Assistant of his Congregation.

All these souvenirs, so dear to his heart, were the subjects of the daily conversations of Father Andrew with his two companions, who were captivated by his stories. And Marie-Therese began to pray, and suffer, for this far-away land, which was becoming so dear to her heart, too.

But this happy life did not last long.

“On Good Friday, on his way to the church to celebrate the office, Father Andrew suddenly fell sick. He had to go to bed at the presbytery, and they brought him to ‘La Betheline’. The next day he had phlebitis. The doctor was very anxious, for a few days, then he realised that the phlebitis was spreading, and that the most complete rest was required.

“Father was leaving his bed, only to go on a lounge chair; after a while, he was able to move about a little upstairs, and to come to see me.”

The expression “to see me” refers to the help Marie-Therese needed for the “supernatural happenings”, about which we will know more later, when we can use Bishop de Boismenu’s own words to describe at least some of them.

She continues: “Two patients, far away from everything, did not make things easier. Father Andrew decided – under Father Meyer’s advice – to buy a property at Chateau-Gombert, where we could be accommodated. After many difficulties and troubles, the bargain was concluded, but a lot of changes and repairs had to be done in our “Gineste”! A cousin of Father Andrew carried us by car, Father and I.” This setting up was going to last until the end of 1920. Again, Marie-Therese adds: “Father Andrew, in spite of his serious illness, had always been able to help us in time of need.”

As a matter of fact, Marie-Therese was accepting this way of life as the programme of God, and was ready to live it to the end, there, in their little home of “La Gineste”, under the loving care of her dear cousin, Marie, who, on her side, had accepted her delicate charge and the will of God for her.

“La Betheline” was to become the Novitiate of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, where many young men would prepare themselves to become priests and brothers in Papua. As for Mr and Madame Palle, they settled in a home of their own in the village. The two cousins seemed to be, at last, settled for life. According to a friendly, but legal, contract, the two cousins would look after Father Jullien, who needed constant care, and would remain in his house after his death.

This is where Marie and Marie-Therese heard the good news of the end of the war in November, 1918. And a few months later, Father Jullien was happy to receive the first letters from Papua, after four years of very difficult postal communications, during the war between the two ends of the world. News, which was a real joy for the old missionary, was that Bishop de Boismenu had started a religious congregation, on the Feast of the Annunciation, 4 April, 1918, with five Papuan girls. A fifth one was soon to join them, from Thursday Island. The six new postulants were preparing themselves for religious life at Inauaia, in Mekeo, under the care of Mother Bernadette, who was kindly lent, for this purpose, by the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. A dream, dear to many missionaries, was becoming a reality.

Father Jullien shared this great news with the two cousins, and added that Bishop de Boismenu would soon come to France, and to Rome, for his ten-yearly visit to the Pope.

In the *Notes* we have largely quoted, which were addressed to Bishop de Boismenu, since written under his request, Marie-Therese continues: “One morning, in July or August (1920), you arrived with Father Bernard and Father Lanctin.

“My lord, I had no idea, at that time, about what you would become for me. On the contrary, I was very frightened of you, and was only trying to avoid you. I think the ‘old one’ was really scared of you, and he was right!” She refers, of course, to the devil, who was her faithful

companion! “We had a party in the bedroom of Father Andrew, who had not been able to get up. After a few days, you left for Rome, promising to come back in winter. What a change would have taken place in our lives, when you would come back!

“On December 7, in the night, Father Andrew felt very sick. He called us. Straight away, his condition became alarming, and Father Meyer, who had been informed, arrived three days later. A telegram was sent to you, my lord, but it never reached you.

“On December 15, at 6 o’clock in the morning, our Father Andrew passed away, without being aware of it.

“On December 17, the funeral took place, under the snow. You arrived that evening, at 10.30. What memories!

“Since that day, they are all common between us.

“Since our arrival at Chateau-Gombert, our good Lord had given me some strength back, and I could help around. Of course, I had to lie down on my couch, from time to time, but, after a little rest, I could start again. Nevertheless, I was not able to go out, and the stairs were causing me great pain, too, and I could hardly sit down. In spite of that, I was happy. The nights were always very painful, but the thanksgiving (after communion) was very pleasant, consoling, and comforting, in the great union with our Beloved.”

And so end the *Notes*, written in 1925. The meeting of Archbishop, then Bishop de Boismenu, with Marie-Therese Noblet, on that 17 December, 1920, was the providential, event which she had been prepared for, in spite of herself, through an eventful, and rather tragic, life, and which brought her to become the “cofoundress” of the Handmaids of Our Lord.

We cannot go into details about what happened during the six following months, which Bishop de Boismenu was invited to spend at “La Gineste”, in order to have the rest he badly needed after ten hard years in Papua. This brought him to be the witness of Marie-Therese’s daily life, with its graces and its trials. We read, in the preface, mentioned above:

“How beautiful was the soul of Marie-Therese, and how well I understand God’s special love for her, and the jealousy of Satan! That cherished spouse of Jesus Christ had learned from Him that to love Him truly, is to serve Him, and to love Him perfectly, is to suffer and die in His service. Thus, the Redeemer loves our souls. Thus it was that Marie-Therese loved her adorable Master. Her life was a continual martyrdom in the service of souls. She served with incredible zeal, and died at her task.”

Through the succession of providential circumstances, Bishop de Boismenu became convinced that Marie-Therese was entrusted to him to become the mother of his Papuan daughters, and, in spite of fears from some, and doubts from others, he brought her back with him to Yule Island where, after a three-months voyage, they arrived, with the famous war hero, Father Leon Bourjade, and a dear old missionary, “Brother Paul”, who was to be devoted as a big brother to the “little sisters”, until his death, at “Nazareth”, near Port Moresby, in 1963.

##### **5. As a Handmaid of our Lord, She Gave Her Life, in Love, to the End (1921-1930)**

Before following Marie-Therese in the last stage of her life, we have every reason to ask ourselves two questions.

In the first place, why, when he saw her in January, 1921, did Bishop de Boismenu think of bringing such a sick person as Marie-Therese to Papua?

To understand this apparently foolish desire, we must realise that the Bishop of Papua had left his mission in a very critical situation, after four years of war, during which many missionaries had died, while none had come from France to continue their work.

When he arrived in France, in mid-1920, “Bishop Alain”, as he was known, was full of hope. He visited the houses of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, saw the Superiors, and went to Rome. He expressed his needs, and trusted that God would listen to his prayer. But, in France also, his Congregation had suffered, both from the tragedies of the battlefields, and from the want of vocations, during this very critical period.

When he finally reached Marseille, for his very needed rest in the mild climate of Provence, his “shepherd’s” heart was heavy! He had little hope of going back with a large group of missionaries, as he had expected to. This was surely one of the topics of his conversations with his old friend, Father Meyer, when they spoke, heart to heart, after Father Jullien had gone “home” to God.

Once, rather as a joke, Father Meyer said to the Bishop: “Why don’t you bring these two ladies with you?” – meaning Marie and Marie-Therese. “What could I do with them?”, was the answer.

But, soon after Father Meyer had gone back to his duties, Marie-Therese fell sick, and the Bishop was called to her bedside. He was then brought to discover the treasures of her spiritual life: her courage and generosity, her total disposability to God, her immense love for the crucified Lord, her zeal to “save souls”, and the power of her sufferings, so totally united to those of Calvary. The thought came to his mind that the prayer and suffering of Marie-Therese would be a wonderful “power house” of spiritual wealth for his Mission, and could make up for the missionaries he could not find. But was not this foolish? She would have to be cured!

This is what he told his daughters, the Handmaids of Our Lord, in his *Souvenirs*:

“It was during one of the holy hours that our Lord entrusted the soul of Marie-Therese to my care, with the task of assisting her in her tragic and fearful mission of “child of Calvary”. It was then, too, that the hope was born of seeing her in New Guinea one day, helping in our apostolate. Surely a vain hope, when our Mother was so sick, given up by the doctors, with no prospect of being cured, much less of being able to journey half around the world to come here!”<sup>34</sup> But God stepped in!

Then, our second question. How did the Bishop think of Marie-Therese as a Mother for his Handmaids of Our Lord?

There, too, he was facing a big problem. In 1918, he had entrusted his young future religious to Mother Bernadette, a daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,<sup>35</sup> who had generously shared the life of the little new born Congregation for over two years, first in her own station, at Inauaia, in

Mekeo, then in their new home, at “Kubuna”, at the foot of the Owen Stanley Range. But this situation could only be provisional. The Bishop had gone to Issoudun to discuss the matter with the Mother General. Mother Bernadette could not continue to live away from her own Congregation, and her Superiors could not give her a companion, a solution, which, anyhow, would have still been temporary.

As usual, the Bishop put his trust in ‘his divine Master’. Let us listen to him again: “God has always taken the lead, so much for everything in our work! We have only to follow, and to accept. It was not I who founded your religious family. I only considered it, and established it, at the prayer of your first little sisters,<sup>36</sup> who came to me, asking for the religious life, and unable to find it elsewhere. God brought them to me, I received them gladly.

“Thus it was for your little Mother in 1921. At the worst point of a hopeless illness, she begged God to cure her, so that she could give herself to our Mission. The Blessed Virgin came to heal her on April 4, and gave her to you. I accepted her. . . .” And he added: “Thus it has been for all in our dear family of the Handmaids. God has led it by the hand, like the very little child, the baby of His church. Really, we have only to keep our eyes fixed on His, and our hand in His own. All will be well.”<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the “roads” of Marie-Therese Noblet, and of the daughters of Bishop de Boismenu were converging towards one another for a long time. On the one side, Marie-Therese had been cured at Lourdes, and, when called, Mary of Nazareth: “*ecce ancilla domini*”, expressing a total acceptance of His will for her. On the other side, the “Little Sisters” had been called “Handmaids of Our Lord”, because they had been founded on the Feast of the Annunciation, 1918, and they had, and still have, a great and special love for Our Lady of Lourdes, because their “father founder”, Bishop de Boismenu, had said first mass, after his ordination, on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11 February, 1895. The fusion of the two roads would be easy.

This is what we will see as we recall the last years of Mother Marie-Therese on earth.

Let us now go back to find Marie-Therese, on the last stretch of her long trip from France. After a quiet week at Yule Island, where she had been



warmly welcomed, Marie-Therese left, with Bishop de Boismenu, for the convent of the Handmaids, situated along the Kubuna River, about 30 kilometres inland from the coast, opposite Yule Island.

As we have seen, the new Congregation had started at Yule Island, in 1918, and, after a few months at Inauaia, in Mekeo, had settled in the “home” prepared for them, in the middle of a beautiful forest. It is there that the first group of Sisters: Sisters Marie, Annie, Mona, Antoinette, Mathia, and Dorahad, had taken the habit, on May 31, 1919, to begin their novitiate – the first step of religious life – and pronounced their first vows on November 30, 1920.

The arrival of Marie-Therese was a surprise. This is what we read in the *Journal* of the community:<sup>38</sup> “On November 28, we went to meet our Bishop on the road, with our Mother Bernadette, who was still our Mother then. He arrived with Mother Marie-Therese, who is now our Mother. How happy we were to have our Father Bishop with us again, after his long absence of one year.

“We made our six-day retreat with him.

“The last day of the retreat, when our Bishop had finished his conference, he announced to us the sad news that our dear Mother Bernadette was to leave us. We loved her very much, as she had been with us for three years. It was a great sacrifice to see her go.

“The day before our Feast of the Immaculate Conception, our dear Mother Marie-Therese, as she had already been prepared in France, took the habit of the Handmaids of Our Lord, in little chapel. How moved we were to see her with our habit. After the ceremony, our Bishop introduced her to us, and said, ‘This is your Mother.’

“On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, our Mother Marie-Therese made her profession. What a beautiful ceremony! She was in our own little chapel. We, the Little Sisters, went to get her, and accompanied her in a procession, with lighted candles, to the church.

“The next day, our dear Mother Bernadette left Kubuna. We were very sorry, but we knew she could not stay always with us, because she belonged to another Congregation.”

From that day on, Mother Marie-Therese shared the life of her daughters. Except when she was really sick, she was with them in their community exercise, their prayer, their work, and their recreations.

Unable to go into details, let us look over the years, to see the main events of the following years.

As soon as 1922, Mother Marie-Therese wanted to see, herself, how her daughters could be of help in the missionary work among their people.

In May, the Bishop was going to Fane, in the Fuyughe Region, for a great ceremony of baptism of adults. Mother Marie-Therese took this opportunity for a first trip to the mountains. It was a five-day journey on horseback. Let us open the *Souvenirs*, and read what marvellous surprise God had for her at Fane – a fact, which, of course, was revealed by Bishop de Boismenu, only after Mother Marie-Therese had been called to God. “It was on the occasion of your Mother’s first trip to the mountains that the most Blessed Virgin came to see her, and smile at her in the church of Fane, on the evening of May 31, 1922.

“There was a crowd for the first adult baptisms. It was a majestic and beautiful ceremony, in the morning.

“Toward evening, we had benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and, of course, your Mother was there, in spite of her fatigue.

“It was then that her tender Heavenly Mother came to her aid. While she was gazing lovingly at our Lord, in the monstrance, all at once, she saw the most Blessed Virgin in person, near her Son, standing on the altar step, turned towards the people. Right until the end of benediction, she remained there, smiling and leaning, sometimes towards the priest (who was the Bishop, himself), and sometimes towards her Son’s little servant at the back of the church.

“This wonderful secret had to be kept to ourselves. But, the next day, armed with a good knife, I went, in secret, to carve a little cross on the alter step, just where the Blessed Virgin Mary had placed her feet. That step has been kept in the new church. It is still there, with its little cross, often adorned with flowers.”<sup>39</sup>

There is an aerodrome, now, just near the church. Anyone flying to, or through, Fane can pop into the church and see the little cross.

The following year, April 5, 1923, we read: “Our Father Bishop gives the sacrament of the sick to our Mother.”

This sentence will be found seven times in the *Journal*: April 5, and August 1, 1923, May 1, and December 31, 1925, January 22, November 10, and September 21, 1926. Her daughters were used to seeing their Mother in bed, and to go and nurse her, as well as share with her, the happenings of their daily life. After a few days, sometimes a month, in bed – during which she would carry on her responsibilities – Mother Marie-Therese would resume her daily life with her community. Surprisingly, her attacks of malaria, big fevers, even pleurisy, always left her in time to follow her programmes of visitations, or travel, so that she could do her duty as Superior. All, for her, was part of her life as sharer of the passion of Christ, whose “programme” she followed, with love and trust.

In February, 1924, Mother Marie-Therese wrote in the *Journal*: “We begin to speak about foundations.”

The trip of 1922 had shown the Papuan Sisters would be very helpful to their missionaries in their stations, and soon, though still very young, they were “sent out” to the service of their brothers and sisters: two at Rarai, in Mekeo, and two at Fane. These two small communities were the first of many, which would be founded later. The Handmaids are now in seven dioceses.

“The work of the Sisters was shared between helping the missionaries in their material and apostolic needs, and attending to the people, at the station or in their villages.

From the beginning, the Sisters had been called to take care of children. By 1925, so many little orphans, whose mothers had died giving them birth, were brought to the convent, from different parts of the mission, that a special house was built for them. It was familiarly called the “baby shed”, in association with the “cow-shed”! It soon became well known, and the care of children became one of the most important works of the Little Sisters.

Every year, Mother Marie-Therese would visit the two stations, go to Yule Island for special occasions, and even to Port Moresby. At home, she would have the visits of many missionaries passing through Kubuna, on their way up and down the mountains. Those who lived with her, or met her, could not help noticing her kind gentleness, her loving smile, her wonderful patience, her sense of humour, her courage, and her joy.

Yet, her fight against the demons continued. "God let the demons persecute your Mother Marie-Therese very much, because she was a saint, eager to offer to Christ Jesus the utmost possible, in suffering and expiation, to gain souls to Him. It is not astonishing that the devil had such a great hatred for her. She worked so well against him for God."<sup>40</sup> But this was her hidden life, known only to Bishop de Boismenu, and, to Father A. Pineau, the chaplain of Kubuna, who were helping her.

The secret of her attitude towards the daily events of her life was in her little word: "ecce", the "yes" of Our Lady, which she had said as a young girl in France, and which was, and still is, the motto of the Handmaids of Our Lord. It meant, for her, complete abandonment, in love, to her heavenly Father; unbounded love to her divine spouse, Jesus Christ; and complete openness to His love, to His spirit, which meant, finally, a life of deep intimacy with the Trinity.

"Ecce" was her final word on January 15, 1930, when she was suddenly on the point of death. After working in her office, she went up, at 11 am, to her bedroom for a rest, as she had often done the previous day, being at grips with a persistent fever. Three hours later, she called out, in great pain. The Sisters found her suffering so much that they called the Bishop, who arrived just in time to anoint her, as she pronounced clearly her "ecce", her eyes fixed on her crucifix, offering Him her life before entering into full union with Him.

And so ended her life of love of Christ, and of heroic service of His church, in a complete gift of herself to those He had entrusted to her care, and whom she helped, through her love, her prayer, and her suffering.

As a conclusion, we must ask ourselves: "How is Mother Marie-Therese's life and example relevant to our time?"

We could not find a better answer than the words of Archbishop de Boismenu: “That cherished spouse of Jesus Christ had learned from Him that, to love Him truly, is to serve Him, and to love Him perfectly, is to suffer and die in His service. Thus, Christ loves our souls; thus it was that Marie-Therese loved her adorable Master. Completely surrendered to God, she left to Him the ordering of her life’s plan. Moreover, the exemplary practice of the Christian virtues, and devotion of the duties of their state in life, is the proof of the supernatural character of the facts in the lives of the saints; that is what sanctifies; that, alone, is what the church canonises, and proposes for our imitation. Marie-Therese lived her Christian life, her religious life, and her missionary life in the manner of the saints”.

Mother Marie-Therese Noblet was a great woman of love, of prayer, and of action. She teaches us to say “yes”, (her “*ecce*”) to God, lovingly, in simplicity, and joy, with a great trust in His boundless love for us, and to love Him in all those we meet, or live with. Her total gift of herself in trust – expressed by her “*scio*” (I know in whom I trust), gives us an example of readiness and generosity in doing the will of God, for courage, and of devotedness. Since it is in Papua New Guinea that she finished her life as a Christian religious, and missionary, we can count on her prayer for our country. Her prayer will help us to love God as she did, and to show our love for Him, and for His children in giving ourselves to them, and doing, as faithfully and well as possible, the humble duties of our daily lives.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Congregation of the Handmaids of Our Lord is an Order of Religious Women, which was founded by Archbishop A. de Boismenu, in 1918, in Papua New Guinea. The “AD Sister”, as they are familiarly called, has their General House at Waigani, Port Moresby, and their “Mother-House” at “Nazareth”, near the Laloki River. They have members working in six Dioceses in Papua New Guinea, and have two houses in the Dioceses of Cairns, in Australia.
2. Archbishop Alain de Boismenu was consecrated Bishop in 1900, aged 30, and remained “Vicar Apostolic of Papua” until his resignation, because of old age, in 1945. He finished his holy life with the Handmaids of Our Lord at the “birth-place”, Kubuna – about 50 km from Bereina, where he died on November 5, 1945.
3. During this story, we will refer to Archbishop de Boismenu as “Bishop”, as it is the title and the function he had at the time of Mother Marie-Therese’s stay in Papua New Guinea.

4. By “mystic” experience, we mean spiritual graces of union with God, which are beyond men’s understanding, and are given, by God, to persons He chooses, purely out of love. We must accept that such graces remain a mystery for those, who have not experienced them.
5. Acts 2:11.
6. Matt 11:25.
7. “Marie-Therese Noblet”, A. Pineau MSC Dillon, Paris, 1938, p. 140.
8. *Souvenirs of Marie-Therese Noblet*, written by Archbishop de Boismenu for the Handmaids of Our Lord around 1940. These few lines are from the introduction.
9. The following texts are taken from the notes Mother Marie-Therese wrote about her childhood, and her youth: some in 1908, after her cure at Lourdes, others in 1925, at the request of Bishop de Boismenu.
10. A Congregation of Sisters, whose Mother-House was in Reims, 60 kilometres from Signy, a city famous for its beautiful cathedral, and for its “champagne”, the wine called after the surrounding region, planted with vine.
11. Mr Palle had married the sister of Mr Noblet, Marie-Therese’s father. Mr and Madame Palle had two daughters: Germaine, who died young, and Marie, ten years older than Marie-Therese, who plays a major role in her cousin’s life, as we will see.
12. Doctor and Madame Panis, parents of Marie-Therese’s mother, lived in a two-story house in the centre of Reims.
13. Madame Panis died on November 23, 1896. In two years, Marie-Therese had seen four of her dear ones “called to God”. The “life after life” was a reality for her.
14. Peritonitis, an infection of the appendix, which generally requires an urgent operation.
15. Louis and Marie-Therese would go to their paternal grandmother at Signy, and on to their mother’s sister, Madame Bur, who lived with her family at Epernay, a town 30 kilometres south of Reims.
16. October, in Europe, is, each year, the beginning of a new school year, after the summer holidays, like our February in Papua New Guinea.
17. John 14:2.
18. Marie-Therese made her first communion late, as it was the custom until Pope Pius X allowed children to receive the Eucharist at seven. She was mature enough to make a responsible “gift of herself” to God.
19. Doctor Boissarie was the very well-known physician, who was responsible, for many years, for the judgment on the authenticity of miracles.
20. From now on, the quotations, without references, will be from the second account of 1925 only.
21. “Notes” of Archbishop de Boismenu, 1921-1930, p. 104, typed copy.
22. Marie Palle, her first cousin. See note 11.
23. Marie-Therese did not want to live in the large home of her Grandmother Noblet. A small cottage, between the homes, in the village, was sufficient for her humble life of service to the

poor. Her furniture came from her Uncle Bur's home at Epernay, where she had her own room.

24. "Satan", the devil, is the enemy and the tempter of men, since he succeeded in making the first man fall. The demons, as evil spirits, are fallen angels, who have become the helpers of Satan. They obey him and work under him. The Resurrection of Christ marked the victory of Satan and all his followers. But they continually try to make men fall into sin, and the Church is engaged in a war against them. God watches over His privileged children.

25. *Souvenirs*, of Archbishop de Boismenu, paragraph 25.

26. To be a "victim", in the spiritual sense of the word, is to continue the sacrifice on Calvary, to prolong it, as it were, from generation to generation, and, according to St Paul's words, to complete it: "I am happy about my sufferings, for by my physical suffering, I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's suffering, on behalf of His body, the Church" (Col 1:24). Even if we tried to explain these words, we would still have to say that suffering is a mystery.

27. Reparation: prayer or sacrifice offered as compensation for one's sins, or the sins of others.

28. A "relic" is a little piece of clothes, belonging to someone renowned for his or her sanctity. Having a relic is a sign of trust, for the person, who used this piece of material, and, if a cure occurs, it can be seen as God's answer to the prayer of that person, who interceded near Him in heaven.

29. This crucifix is now hanging on a wall at the Mother-House of the Handmaids of Our Lord at Waigani.

30. "Ecce Ancifia Domini", in Latin, means "Behold the Handmaid of the Lord". These words are the answer of Mary to the Angel at the Annunciation, the expression of her acceptance of the plan of God for her. "Ecce" will be often used in this story, as an English translation would take off its spiritual "savour".

31. "The others" = the diabolical happenings.

32. Father Cordonnier was their chaplain in Paris.

33. *Souvenirs*, of Archbishop de Boismenu, paragraph 30.

34. The Congregation of Sisters, who worked with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. They have been founded, like them, by Father Chevallier, and have their Mother-House at Issoudun, a small town in the centre of France, where the Congregation was born.

35. The Handmaids of Our Lord were then familiarly called "Little Sisters". They are now known as "AD Sisters", "AD" standing for "Ancilla Domini", "Handmaids of Our Lord".

36. *Souvenirs*, paragraph 7.

37. A diary, where the main events of the life of the Sisters are recorded.

38. *Souvenirs*, paragraph 66.

39. *Souvenirs*, paragraph 25.

40. Preface written by Archbishop de Boismenu for the *Biography of Mother Marie-Therese Noblet*, by Father A. Pineau.