

The Catholic Revival

Our Catholic Heritage

The Church Begins to Reorganize

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

After the Congress of Vienna (1815) had ended the Napoleonic wars, the Catholic Church was free to reorganize herself and to lead the tremendous surge of religious revival which swept across the Catholic and non-Catholic countries of Europe.

The courageous dignity of Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) during his imprisonment by Napoleon brought a wave of sympathy for the Church, and the reckless wars which had devastated Europe persuaded the faithful and the unfaithful to turn their backs on the Age of Reason.

Old religious orders were renewed. Missionary works, always a mark of the Church's spiritual vitality, increased. Saints such as St. Madeline Sophie Barat and St. Clement Maria Hofbauer, appeared, as they always

do in times of crisis, to strengthen their fellow Catholics and the world with their prayers and their example.

Another sign of the Church's renewal was the restoration of the Jesuits in 1814 (they had been suppressed in 1773). Those intrepid men quickly resumed their missionary and educational apostolates. The French government allowed the Sisters of Charity to return to their work in 1807 (Napoleon needed nurses for his wounded), and the Order quickly spread even to the United States.

France also produced many other religious groups dedicated to education and to the home and foreign missions: e.g., the Oblates of Mary Immaculate; the Society of Mary (Marists); the Religious of the Sacred Heart; the Little Sisters of the Poor; the Assumptionists; the Congregation

of the Gray Sisters; the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; and the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Germany produced the Society of the Divine Word, and St. Anthony Claret (d. 1870) founded the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretians).

The Catholics of Ireland were finally given their right to vote and to sit in Parliament by their English lords. In 1833, the Oxford Movement began in England and resulted in many conversions to the faith, e.g. John Henry, Cardinal Newman (d. 1890) and Henry Edward Cardinal Manning (d. 1892). In 1850 Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) re-established the Church in England when he erected the Archdiocese of Westminster. In France and the Netherlands a reverent respect for the Holy See overcame the popular Gallicanism.

One of the most encouraging aspects of this Catholic revival was the participation of the laity in the public and scholarly defense of the faith, and in the work of the hierarchy. Men like Frederick Ozanam, who organized the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and women like Pauline Jaricot, who supported the missions with her Society for the Propagation of the Faith, were outstanding examples of the faithful's wholehearted support for Catholic education, for all charitable causes and for the missions.

The faithful did all this with their meager means while the industrial Revolution was beginning to multiply the social evils of the day, and while Karl Marx was preparing his Communist Manifesto which advocated the eradication of religion, and the violent overthrow of capitalism. The Church would soon have to face this Communist threat to protect her people.

The Poor, French Girl Who Saw God's Mother

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

In 1830, the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Catherine Laboure at the Rue du Bac Convent of the Sisters of Charity in Paris. She directed St. Catherine to promote the wearing of the Miraculous Medal with the inscription: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you."

Twenty-four years later (Dec. 8, 1854), Pope Pius IX by his own supreme teaching authority defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception that "the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the singular favor and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, preserved from all stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception." The Holy Father went on to teach that this doctrine is revealed by God and must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.

In Lourdes, France, in 1854 there lived a 10-year-old girl who had great devotion to the Blessed Mother but could scarcely explain the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Marie Bernarda Soubirous was her name, but her poor family and her friends called her by the pet name Bernadette.

Living in dire poverty, uneducated, stricken by cholera and lingering asthma, she did not seem the stuff of which great saints are made. But on Feb. 11, 1858 while she, her sister and a friend were gathering fire-wood near a grotto of Massabielle which overlooked the banks of the Gave River, near her

home, God granted her the singular privilege of seeing the Virgin Mary.

On subsequent apparitions, the Blessed Mother told Bernadette that she is the Immaculate Concep-

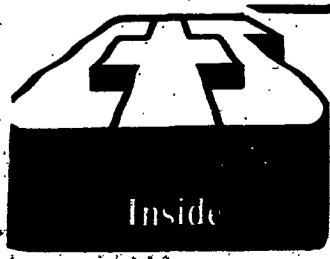


tion, caused a spring of water to gush out of the grotto (Feb. 25) and directed Bernadette to have a chapel built on the site (March 25). Bernadette had almost daily apparitions of the Blessed Mother from Feb. 18 to March 4, then others on a less regular basis until she had her 18th and last meeting with Our Lady on July 15, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Despite the initial objections of her family that she was telling stories, the skepticism of the local authorities and even the doubts of the clergy, Bernadette never varied in her story. Large crowds would accompany her to the grotto, where they never saw the Blessed Mother, but only the young girl rapt in her vision and saying the rosary. But they did see the miraculous spring.

After July 16, Bernadette had no more visions; never changed her story; avoided attention; and entered the nursing Sisters of the Notre Dame at Nevers. There she remained until her death on April 16, 1879. She did not even attend the dedication of the Basilica of Lourdes in 1876.

After precise and lengthy investigations, the Church approved the apparitions, and, in 1933, Pope Pius XI canonized St. Bernadette, whose feast is observed on April 16. Almighty God had chosen a poor girl to give public honor to His mother. Perhaps God used the miracles of Lourdes to confirm the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Certainly, He has used them to give health and hope to millions of people.



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