



*Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration*

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## *Remembering Mother Mary Michael*

### *Living our Dream*

In founding the Congregation of the Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, Fr. Arnold Janssen and Mother Mary Michael had a special aim in view, namely, that the Sisters may through their silent, hidden life of prayer and sacrifice cooperate that all nations of the world may come to know, love and adore their God and Savior in the Blessed Sacrament ever more and more.<sup>1</sup> This worldwide orientation of the cloistered branch was at the beginning more in the spiritual realm through the far-reaching prayer intentions offered in the Motherhouse day and night before the Blessed Sacrament for the support of the missionary activities of their own religious family and the Church at large. With the founding, however, of daughter foundations in North America, the Philippines and Germany, the young Congregation slowly began to unfold its unique character, that of an international community and a contemplative-missionary Congregation. By this significant development, the Founder's dream for the Congregation became a reality. Prayer is at the very heart of St. Arnold's vision of mission. For him, all work for the kingdom of God was firstly and decisively a work of prayer, and this was what motivated him in the founding of his religious family of active and contemplative missionaries.<sup>2</sup> Mother M. Michael's faithfulness to the ideals of St. Arnold and her zealous efforts to bring harmoniously together these seemingly contrasting realities of contemplation and mission brought to fruition the Founder's dream. Hence, it was only natural that she would turn her gaze to the very home country of the Motherhouse, which at that time was such a rich source of vocations, as the next mission prospect. The possibility of opening another convent in the Netherlands would serve to encourage more local vocations, for then Dutch young ladies who felt themselves called to the Congregation would have to join an almost exclusively German community in Steyl.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, a new convent in the country would mean for the Dutch candidates a home within the home.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. A-thought-a-day Guide in striving for religious perfection, July 18

<sup>2</sup> cf. Contemplation and Mission, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 26

<sup>3</sup> cf. *ibid*, p. 144

## *A Week of Untold Blessing*

No Adoration Convent was opened as quickly as the convent in Soesterberg in the Diocese of Utrecht. The pious chronicler in Steyl had the explanation: “It is really touching to observe how Divine Providence watches over our young Congregation and so silently and without being noticed arranges and guides everything and prepares things from afar and then when the time is ripe reveals the plans and brings them to completion.”<sup>1</sup> Since the Sisters always wanted to have their convents near an SVD house, they thought of Teteringen or Soesterberg. However, they learned through a newspaper article in January 1927 that the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration<sup>2</sup> had already opened a convent and an Adoration Church in Teteringen; so that left Soesterberg as the only possible place for the new foundation. Time was of the essence, and so the Sisters had to hurry.<sup>3</sup> As early as January 15, a letter draft to Fr. Marinus van Es, SVD, the rector of St. Jan in Soesterberg, had been drawn up stating that it was time to look around the Utrecht area “so that no one comes before us.” The Sisters were actually thinking of acquiring a villa where the SVD community had lived until they built a new house, which was at that moment for sale. But before the letter could be sent, Fr. van Es came in person to Steyl because some Carmelite nuns had asked him about the possibility of buying the place for themselves. At first, he discussed the matter with Dean Fock of Amersfoort,<sup>4</sup> who was a member of the cathedral chapter and so must vote for or against the establishment of a new foundation, and the latter surprisingly asked: “But why not offer it to the Steyl Adoration Sisters?” For this reason, Fr. van Es came to Steyl to ask the Sisters’ opinion. The chronicle writes about this visit: “And so it happened that the SVD Rector came to us. We had a long chat with him and with Fr. Director General auf der Heide. Fr. van Es brought along with him a small sketch showing the fittings and furnishings of the villa and a photograph of the place. The matter proceeded quickly, and we decided that Fr. auf der Heide should travel to Soesterberg with Fr. van Es on Sunday to visit Archbishop van de Wetering of Utrecht and ask him for permission to open a convent.” As planned, Fr. auf der Heide went to Soesterberg to see the archbishop on February 13. Subsequently a written application dated February 14, 1927 was sent to the archbishop asking for permission to open a convent.<sup>5</sup> In reply the archbishop wrote M. M. Michael on February 17 the following: “In accordance with your written application, we

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<sup>1</sup> Contemplation and Mission, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 143

<sup>2</sup> cf. H. Fischer, Mutter Maria Michaela, Adolfine Tönnies, Mitgründerin und erste Generaloberin der Steyler Anbetungsschwestern (Steyl 1938/ August 2013), p. 89

<sup>3</sup> cf. Contemplation and Mission, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 144

<sup>4</sup> cf. *ibid.*, p. 145

<sup>5</sup> cf. M. M. Michael to Archbishop H. van de Wetering, Letter no. 020734a

hereby gladly grant your Reverence the permission to establish an Adoration Convent of your Congregation in Soesterberg. We implore God to bless richly this new foundation so that you may fulfill the noble purpose of your Congregation.” The Sisters were very delighted and they immediately began a novena of thanksgiving to praise God for his gracious providence.<sup>6</sup> And so it was that this foundation was happily secured within a week, and M. M. Michael was full of gratitude to the good Lord, whose help they had visibly experienced.<sup>7</sup> Gratitude, being an outstanding virtue of M. M. Michael, came spontaneously in her letter of thanks to the archbishop, to the dean of Amersfoort and to Fr. van Es, revealing the sincere sentiment of her heart and her full assurance of the Congregation’s unfailing prayerful support.

### *A Villa turned Cenacle*

The farewell celebration was held in Steyl on June 19. Nine newly-professed Sisters received their appointments: Sr. Ma. Elizabeth as superior, Sr. Ma. Agatha, Sr. Ma. Stephania, Sr. Ma. Monika, Sr. Ma. Brigitta, Sr. Ma. Adolfine, Sr. Ma. Crescentia, Sr. Ma. Cäcilia and a postulant Miss Stultiens.<sup>8</sup> Mother M. Michael herself accompanied the group to Soesterberg.<sup>9</sup> On June 24, 1927, the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the cloister was solemnly blessed. It was named Cenacle of the Eucharistic Heart, otherwise called “The Cenacle.”<sup>10</sup> The latter comes from the Latin expression, *Coenaculum*, or the room of the Last Supper. The generally accepted tradition locates the “Upper Room” (of the Last Supper) in the house of John, whose surname was Mark, on Mt. Zion; this is where Mary spent the rest of her life and where the Pentecost miracle also took place.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the new cloister bore this double meaning, an allusion to the Eucharist and to Pentecost. Dean Fock of Amersfoort presided over the solemn inauguration and thereafter celebrated the first Mass, followed by the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, after which the Sisters began their service of perpetual adoration. The monstrance was presented by Mr. van der Broeck, Sr. Ma. Monika’s father, as a gift to the young community.<sup>12</sup> Soon enough, candidates requested admittance to the cloister and the young little tree began to grow and bloom.

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<sup>6</sup> cf. *Contemplation and Mission*, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, pp. 144-145

<sup>7</sup> cf. cf. H. Fischer, Mutter Maria Michaela, Adolfine Tönnies, Mitgründerin und erste Generaloberin der Steyler Anbetungsschwestern (Steyl 1938/ August 2013), p. 90

<sup>8</sup> cf. *Contemplation and Mission*, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 145

<sup>9</sup> cf. H. Fischer, Mutter Maria Michaela, Adolfine Tönnies, Mitgründerin und erste Generaloberin der Steyler Anbetungsschwestern (Steyl 1938/ August 2013), p. 90

<sup>10</sup> cf. „het Cenakel“ in: *Geisteswehen Aus Stillen Klosterhallen 1* (1927), p. 11

<sup>11</sup> cf. *Our Visit to Israel*, Emmanuel Dehan, 1982, p. 30

<sup>12</sup> cf. *Contemplation and Mission*, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 145

## *The Peaceful Eden*

Through the years the little Cenacle became too small for the growing community; hence the need for a more spacious convent. It was then absolutely an act of faith and trust in Divine Providence, for in spite of the uncertainty of the times, the building of the new convent began in 1939, only months before the outbreak of World War II. Will the war bring everything into ruin? The Lord came again to their assistance. After a few weeks of suspension, the construction proceeded and was completed. Thus the blessing of the new sanctuary, in all discreetness, was set for June 24, 1940, the Feast of St. Bartholomew, the Apostle. Mother M. Michael did not live to see this lovely place of the new Cenacle; but to honor her memory for having built this house, the church bell was named after her.<sup>1</sup> Beautiful park-like grounds surrounded the lovely chapel and the large convent, a truly ideal place for a contemplative cloister. But the silence of this peaceful Eden disappeared when an international military airport was built nearby. Consequently, supersonic jets from far and near zoomed over the convent day and night,<sup>2</sup> indeed a formative challenge for all who seek the Lord in silence, that in prayer “with filial reverence, we come before God, and amid the noise and unrest of the this world, are a sign of the fruitfulness that results from the repose and concentration of all one’s powers in God, in anticipation of the final state of mankind in its contemplation and lasting possession of God in the heavenly city.”<sup>3</sup>

## *The Legacy Remains*

In the course of time the community in the Cenacle was confronted with the problem of an increasing number of Sisters needing nursing care. These Sisters were happily welcomed into the nursing home of the Missionary Sisters in Uden. With the reduced number of Sisters, the entire area of the building obviously could not anymore be maintained. Being the only Dutch community, the Congregation decided to continue to maintain a Dutch house in the Netherlands; however, they would have to move to a smaller place. A modest parish building in the city of Utrecht was found, in the former Ludger Parish. There the community transferred residence and had the solemn blessing of the house on September 8, 1999.<sup>4</sup> By the grace of Divine Providence, the Eucharistic legacy of M. M. Michael for the Church in the Netherlands remains, and the small community rejoices as ever to share with the faithful the richest blessings flowing from the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. „Soesterberg (holland) Cenakel“ in: Geisteswehen Aus Stillen Klosterhallen 15 (1940), p. 9

<sup>2</sup> cf. Burning Lamps, p. 53

<sup>3</sup> Constitutions and Directory of the Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, n. 113

<sup>4</sup> cf. Sharings, December 1997; June 1998; Record - File