

From Our Motherhouse in Munich, October 26, 1852

Very Reverend Doctor!¹

(Ed. note: Underlining was in the original letter)

By now, you have received 200 florin, the woolen socks, and our letter brought by Father Ambrosius, a Carmelite missionary from Bavaria and brother of our dear Sister M. Margareta Käß.

We will see to it that we get a check through Court Chaplain Müller.² Then we can send you several hundred more so that you will have money for the journey. We beg you not to suffer want and to provide yourself with warm clothes for the winter. Do not worry if woolen articles are expensive in Rome. It is not too much for us because everything depends on your good health and safe return. May God grant the speedy and successful completion of our very important business!

We will not write any more about Mass stipends; you know our request and the designated intention until you are with us here again.

We have not received any response from the archbishop³ to your last petition to extend your stay in Rome. I am probably to blame for this because I have not submitted the draft of our petitions to the Holy Father yet and could hardly submit them now because the matter would probably get even more involved. It could turn into a real dispute. No one can advise me; no one wants to tell me what to do. What are they saying in Rome? If God does not call me through Rome, I cannot go there. As God wills!

No one here wants me to go. They say, "To what avail? It is altogether unnecessary." His Eminence, the Apostolic Nuncio,⁴ also talked that way and said that I cannot even speak a foreign language, and so forth. That is certainly true and it is my own fault but God led me across the ocean and back again and I could only speak my native tongue. God, who has come to my help so often, can also help me find a solution to this.

How painful! From what we hear, our cause appears to be a charge against the archbishop, which does not help us and which will be misinterpreted in Rome. Will this not harm us? I never wanted to complain against the archbishop, as you know. What I feared in the beginning is happening now!

The Apostolic Nuncio paid us a visit on behalf of the Holy Father and then he spoke with

¹ **Document 1250:** Letter to Dr. Bernard Schels who was in Rome as Mother Theresa's representative from August 1852 until January 1854

² Joseph Ferdinand Müller, Court Chaplain and Business Manager of the Louis Mission Society with its headquarters in Munich

³ Carl August von Reisach, Archbishop of Munich and Freising (1846-56)

⁴ Archbishop Carlo Sacconi, Apostolic Nuncio to Germany (June 6, 1851-October 5, 1853)

our archbishop. In the beginning, his Eminence only spoke about errors to my interpreter (Sister Margareta [of Cortona Wiedemann] from Amberg). About me it was said that:

1. Until now, I have only acted arbitrarily and everything depends on me. I have departed from the real purpose intended by our founder (a priest from the diocese of Regensburg at one time). Everything is going in the wrong direction and it is unsuitable for Poor School Sisters. We are aiming too high; we are only meant for poor children, especially those in the country, and so forth. Now we are going even further and teaching foreign languages!

You already know what we said in reply because we often discussed these two points in great detail. I only want to indicate here that we refer to Job's book as the *Spirit of the Constitutions*,⁵ in which the founder himself refers to the Notre Dame Rule that we accepted and according to which we lived and professed simple religious vows. The sisters have copies of the regulations taken from this rule if they can still be followed despite our growth and expansion, the circumstances of our times, and the laws of the land regarding schools. All of this happened with the knowledge of the bishops who gave us their advice and approval.

Furthermore, the founders of blessed memory entrusted all of this to me and instructed me to turn to the Holy See only after we had sufficient experience.

We also explained why we bear the name, Poor School Sisters and its significance, i.e., given the circumstances of the times, we could more easily come to life with this name because, as our holy founders said, we could never have developed as Notre Dame sisters. Moreover, the title declares our free and unrestrained acceptance of the fact that as members of the order, we want to lead a very poor life so that we can easily have houses in poor communities.

We explained that the word *poor* refers only to the vow of poverty and to the poor way of life that we sisters want to lead so that we can serve the children more easily wherever Divine Providence leads us. The word poor does not refer to our field of labor, however, as if we were only allowed to teach poor children. We have institutes in places that extend from cities to the smallest villages. It is also true that we have boarding schools for very poor children, for children who will become servants, and for the middle class. (We do not have boarding schools for the higher class and therefore do not take away anything from other religious societies either.) Nothing is lacking.

Even persons who will be servants need to learn foreign languages because otherwise, they will no longer find employment in stores or with the higher class. With railroads now, contact with other countries is growing hourly so

⁵ Francis Sebastian Job, *Spirit of the Constitutions of the Religious Congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame* (Vienna, 1833)

that if you do not know foreign languages, you cannot get ahead in the world (just as I cannot go to Rome).

The majority of our vocations come from our boarding schools. The royal government demands much of our teachers. Should teachers lag behind servants? It does not work.

We can no longer establish ourselves in little country villages and market towns where most of the civil servants are penniless. We must obtain most of our livelihood from our boarding schools. No matter how poorly we live as Poor School Sisters, we cannot manage with the little income we receive in the country or in the cities. If we may not make progress in further education with our own members as well as with the children and boarders entrusted to us, our dissolution is inevitable. We could not survive and follow our educational purpose and program. Our extinction would be inevitable. We would become obsolete and no longer able to comply with the country's educational laws.

Furthermore, we did not begin teaching languages in Munich. This is already the fourteenth year that we have been teaching French in Amberg, which also paved the way toward our taking over all the weekday classes there. We had nothing to do with the fact that God sent us very talented people with skill in languages. Should we turn them away because we only teach poor children? Moreover, we did not seek such places; God sent them all.

Even those orders whose original purpose was never teaching and character training make progress in this regard in order to be able to secure their existence and extend their work for the salvation of their neighbor. Orders that were never concerned with ordinary schools accept village schools in order to achieve the purposes mentioned above. Each order does what it can in God's fields. All may work together and precisely in that manner that will achieve a common goal best of all. We are the object of a kind of spiritual envy everywhere, even from religious. They set their goals terribly low and apply for places bound with every kind of obligation that are simply offered to us.

When our forerunners began their common religious life in France,⁶ they only had poor village children. How God blessed them wherever Divine Providence led them! We still see their work today, like their beginning in the past (very poor and small).

How do things stand with the house in Württemberg that was torn away from us?⁷ Does it only have poor children? Was our education and knowledge too

⁶ Alix LeClerc and the Congrégation Notre-Dame, which was founded in 1597.

⁷ A house was opened in Rottenburg in Württemberg in September 1850 but separated from the motherhouse in Munich in May 1852.

advanced there? How is it turning out in Bohemia?⁸ In addition to their native language, German and French are also required there. Could that house survive if languages were not taught? No! Although the first house there is in a small, poor village, it must still be concerned about this.

We see the same situation across the ocean. If the sisters want to become established and survive there, they must teach German, French, and music in addition to English, the language of the country. The bishops even ask them to do this.

The seed of life for the young order lies precisely in the fact that we Poor School Sisters must be suitable everywhere and fulfill our mission in all places and with every class of people that Divine Providence gives us. This is the order's life thread that should now be severed.

- 2) Forgive me for being so long-winded. I must return to the second accusation, i.e., that I greatly deceived the archbishop, put myself over everyone else, came into conflict with the bishops, and wanted to rise above them. (I asked for an example to explain this and the Apostolic Nuncio said that I told the archbishop that we had only one copy of the old rule book, which he took from me, but that is not true. When the archbishop was in Eichstätt,⁹ he himself gave me six copies.

That is certainly true, but these books were only general ones, i.e., the incomplete rule that did not contain all the sections. We burned these in 1848, the year of the revolution, but the archbishop does not want to believe this. Sister Forreria [Schiesser] was present and said that she herself had carried them to the fire because we were in such great danger and we knew how it went with books and documents belonging to other orders during that turbulent time.¹⁰

(It seems to me that it was an act of Divine Providence that this example was cited in the story because the archbishop thereby provided evidence that already then, he knew the rule by which we endeavored to live. He also proved this by the eight-day retreat that he conducted, which was a great blessing for us. Ninety sisters heard him refer precisely to this rule but we may not even mention it anymore. How can it be that I gave the sisters orders on my own judgment alone?)

Whatever is from me, I would immediately cast aside before the whole world, before the Holy See. Little or nothing, thanks be to God, will be found that is not wholly and entirely in the old rule—as our professed sisters in the

⁸ A house was opened in Hirschau in Bohemia (now Hyřov in the Czech Republic) in December 1851.

⁹ Archbishop Reisach was Bishop of Eichstätt from 1836 until 1846.

¹⁰ M. Theresa was still in America when the revolution broke out in Munich in March 1848.

motherhouse affirm—except when the conditions of the times and other circumstances demanded an exception. The spirit of religious discipline and order, thanks be to God, is present. This is what our sisters who live with each other are saying.

The Rottenburg story also came up for discussion, i.e., how I behaved and acted toward the bishops and so forth, at which time we said that this was a single case. The two bishops¹¹ did not bring this about but outside influences and an unfaithful sister who left us.¹²

(Did our testimonials, which we have from the bishops, arrive in Rome and did anyone pay any attention to them? They must be seen, not on my account but for the sake of the cause. How it grieves me that such suffering has befallen God's work because of me and precisely now when it should receive canonical status and a prominent person is standing in the way! Woe betides me if the Lord records my sins because of the destruction of God's holy cause! I certainly deserve all punishment—I say this in all truth—because my heart is overcome with bitterness. If only God would have mercy on this work! Oh, plead for this grace at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles! No salvation will come from here.

- 3) If I had given the sisters directives on my own, they would have had to live according to my thinking and would not know anything about constitutions and rules. (This is also stated above. In any case, you know the situation, having seen it for yourself.)

These are more or less some of the accusations. From the entire situation, it is clear that Rome and the Apostolic Nuncio know all the opinions very well and how our archbishop sees the cause, which makes our situation terribly difficult. I must take second place to the archbishop. The church's reputation and my submission to the church and to our archbishop require this. Accusations against me and excuses for the archbishop were really the main topic of our discussion. May God do with me whatever is pleasing to God! I am willing to do anything if only God's most holy will directs the cause.

Only after this, the question arose if all the sisters are for the general superior or rather, if they would choose her. There are also doubts about this, which I very well deserve. It seems that our entire community and I have lost everyone's confidence. Furthermore, I was informed that the Holy See wants me to report all the transfers of sisters including those in other dioceses to the archbishop because I am subject to his authority. Therefore, the Holy See has not abolished our decree¹³ but confirmed it instead. I think that we must conduct ourselves very quietly because otherwise, the Sacred

¹¹ Archbishop Reisach and Joseph von Lipp, Bishop of Rottenburg (now Rottenburg-Stuttgart) (1847-69)

¹² M. Rosa Franz

¹³ See Document 1171, April 22, 1852.

Congregation¹⁴ might hold that we are definitely rebellious. May God grant a speedy decision! Everything will go to ruin otherwise.

Nevertheless, it seems that the archbishop may not separate any more houses from us until Rome decides.

According to reports from Rottenburg, we treated that house so abominably that it had to be separated from us. It was our fault. That is how they are talking in other countries, in social gatherings, and so forth.

The Apostolic Nuncio wrote down the dioceses where we have sisters. He will probably inform the bishops about our situation as well as the instructions that we will receive from Rome in the meantime. He will probably tell them about the plan for us, which our archbishop submitted in Rome for confirmation, and ask for their opinion.

The Apostolic Nuncio also made note of Rottenburg. Perhaps it has to do with an investigation, the result of which is easy to conclude. God forbid that Rome judges us accordingly! We will see if Mast, the Seminary Director, comes to Rome soon, as you already suspected.

We still do not have the written decree with our instructions that we will receive from Rome. I expect a new papal announcement and there is certainly no doubt that a signature will be necessary. In any case, they know about my opposition in Rome.

We finally received the enclosed plan by our archbishop. We are to add our remarks, which we will do more or less according to the enclosed if that is sufficient and acceptable to us. According to your last letter, you have the archbishop's plan to judge and have probably read it, but if not, it is enclosed.

The Apostolic Nuncio also told us that, according to the view of the archbishop, there must be a separation of the houses outside Bavaria because of national laws, and every country must have its own superior. We referred to the Religious of the Sacred Heart and other already existing orders, to unity, to the advantages of the connection, and so forth, but our words will hardly find a hearing. According to all appearances and statements, our outline will not be accepted because there will be more votes for the archbishop's plan. Unless God works a miracle through the Sacred Congregation, it has already happened. The evidence, information, and conclusions that we have gathered here will hardly turn the tables for us.

The plan presented in Rome for us by the archbishop contains nothing more than his own justification in the Rottenburg affair. Everything is written in the plan as the archbishop said, "It must be done the way I want it to be and that is the way it will go in Rome, too."

How often I told you my reservation that in the end, we will have to structure ourselves

¹⁴ Now known as the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

according to the new house in Rottenburg! We will have to accept the same constitution and now this is really the case. Our sisters say at every paragraph: "Oh, just like Rottenburg! Lord, have mercy on us!!!"

If Rome does not put an end to the matter, our dissolution is at hand even if the work of God is flourishing. Today there are approximately 700 children in the weekday and holiday schools in our motherhouse and you know the approximate number in the Au.¹⁵ The children are very attached to the sisters, despite all the disputing by parents, clergy, and others. It was precisely because of our shaky existence, a difficult situation that is becoming more and more evident, that the children could not be kept away from the sisters and came back again.

Our boarding school has 100 pupils, 30 of whom want to remain in the convent. We have 50 candidates in the house and even the royal government pays attention to them and intends to establish scholarships for them, provide a musical instrument, and so forth.

Both here and in the Au, the buildings will soon be ready. The chapel in the Au is very nice. With the mediation by Monsignor [George von] Reindl, the institute for poor children and adults is growing and now they are putting up a central institute in the Au suburb. I will enclose more about that at the end of my letter.

Would our dear Lord let this work develop so beautifully so that its ruin will be even more painful, even more noticeable? I cannot believe this and continue to hope that God's mercy will not punish the whole work because of my sins.

With everything flourishing as it is, Rome should decide soon, very soon. Parents and clergy, i.e., from religious orders, are very concerned about our future existence. I recently heard that parents of a very good family would not allow their daughter to enter with us because no decision has come from Rome yet.

Therefore, the entire body is swaying and tottering and finally the secular government will be involved because our sisters are employed as teachers. It could come to an awful end, which the Apostolic Nuncio also told me. May God thwart the old saying, "Often the most beautiful works flourish for 50 years and then fall into ruin!"

¹⁵ Dr. Schels served as catechist and confessor at the mission in the Au suburb for approximately one year before he left for Rome in August 1852.

We all beg you to have a few devout religious communities pray and do good works for us. Our situation is terribly difficult. Do not abandon us but persevere in Rome until a decision regarding our outline is made! We beg this of you for Jesus' sake!

Finally, when his Eminence was leaving, we gave him our outline that five bishops had signed. Expressing his joy over this, he immediately wanted to keep it. He also said that he wanted to show it to the archbishop but we asked for its return again. We want to give the Apostolic Nuncio both our outline and our response to the archbishop's plan in French. In the enclosed you will see how the bishops signed the outline.

Enclosures:

Number 1 is our archbishop's plan as he presented it for confirmation in Rome.

Number 2 is the reply that we intend to make.

Number 3 contains the signatures of the bishops relative to the outline we presented.

Now we are sending our outline and that of the archbishop to all of our professed sisters in Bavaria. They are completely free to decide which they wish to approve. If we have these signatures, we will also enclose them, but it will probably take a while before we get all of them.

Nevertheless, we think the cause is growing in stability and thoroughness. May God grant that the Sacred Congregation will not convene at the beginning of November, but only at the end, and that Prince Hohenlohe¹⁶ would be able to present our need to both the papal emissaries and the examiner of this cause in a very clear and calm manner and as it stands before God!

May God's Holy Spirit be with you, give you strength and inspiration, and allow you to obtain this favor for us!!!

Our archbishop will not and cannot place any obstacles in your way and therefore you will be allowed to continue working on our cause and acting as our agent. I am concerned about that because all of us will have to go through bitter suffering. Oh, please do not abandon us! Find just solutions instead, if it should come to that!

It makes me wonder if all of our petitions and testimonials ever reached the Holy See. If you think it advisable to send our signed German outline to you, we will do this but we beg you to bring it back again. No matter how things go, it will remain a valuable document and belongs in the convent archives as part of our chronicle of God's work.

Well, that is the way things are with us. How are you? We often wonder with a yearning sigh. Please give us news again soon!

Our Reverend Father [Mathias Siegert] is alone, misses you very much, and is almost crushed by the burden. He went to Regensburg and Eichstätt to acquaint the two

¹⁶ Prince Gustav Adolf von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst was ordained a priest in 1849.

bishops¹⁷ with the new outline. May God bless and keep him! He sends cordial greetings in the Lord, as does everyone in our house and in the Au.

Every day we are convinced that it is almost universal knowledge that you are in Rome because of our rule. Monsignor [George] Reindl, the cathedral dean and proposed coadjutor of the archbishop of Bamberg,¹⁸ also asked if you were returning and if you would stay in the institute.¹⁹ I did not want to answer directly but it came up anyway and I heard that he asked the same question of the Vicar General, [Friedrich] von Windischmann. The latter said that you would probably not stay if you return and that you wanted to leave from the very beginning.

I am supposed to ask you the same question because they are expanding and enlarging the institute as I noted above. They do not want to see it without a priest. The boys no longer attend the public elementary school but are taught at the institute by a male teacher and whenever possible, by the priests themselves. In about three years, they hope to put up a building in the large institute garden, the so-called Heights. The girls would remain with us.

See how beautifully the Lord prepared the way for the teaching brothers! The cause is turning out precisely the way we once discussed and without our having been involved in any way. Indeed, we were even approached, given the means and the place, even if it was very small and sparse at the beginning, as it always was with our origin and foundation. Should this not be God's way? Please let me know your opinion.

I only regret that we are now involved in such disputes that if God allows, even the Holy See could have doubts about us.

If only we were in another diocese now! If the generalate is recognized by the Holy See, could it be located outside the diocese—at least until everything is settled and put aright? Is there no other possibility? Although the nuncio told us that if we were given exceptional orders, we should turn to him—but my God! Our first conversation deterred us somewhat. We concluded that we could not expect much in such cases, but the last thing I want is any judgment, any sound of complaint about our church authorities. Please do not allow anyone to see this. It is sufficient if you know this so that you can help us with your prayer.

If only I were no longer here, if only I were not the superior! The archbishop and the Holy See could help immediately. In whatever way the cause is decided, things will never go well for me here.

I almost forgot to say that I also asked Monsignor Reindl, "If Doctor [Schels] does not want to stay at the institute in the Au, then what?" We continued, "We would be happy if

¹⁷ Valentine von Riedel, Bishop of Regensburg (1841-57) and George von Öttl, Bishop of Eichstätt (1846-66)

¹⁸ Boniface Caspar von Urban, Archbishop of Bamberg (1842-58)

¹⁹ In the Au suburb

he would stay with us in the motherhouse where there is enough work for two priests.” You would do that, wouldn’t you? Please give us your reply because the question keeps coming up and our Sister Margareta from Amberg will have the opportunity to speak personally with the bishop of Regensburg soon if necessary.

O my God, what will become of us?

You will also forgive my well-meant question. Is there anything I can do for your younger brother now at the beginning of the new school year? We will do it most gladly and we still have enough money!

I also wanted to tell you about the future direction of our order according to the archbishop’s basic plan but I will only add one thing now. God called us Poor School Sisters into being so that girls and young women would be taught and trained by women and not by men. How would it be, what benefit would it bring, if these same women must be trained, educated, and directed by men and become completely dependent on them like tendrils on a vine, unable to do anything without their knowledge and forced to tell them everything, even the least little things?
How does this fit together?

Women have a trusting nature as it is. Even devout souls become dependent on their confessors. How much there is to do in the spiritual formation of young women in this regard! Until now, we worked valiantly with our young people to open up their hearts. What should we do in the future? What will emerge from this?

The bishop makes himself the director but he can only be in the motherhouse. In reality, there would be one in every diocese. From this, it follows that the bishop needs representatives at the missions, who of course would be the local pastors and we have already experienced how that goes! What will happen when they are granted this right?

The work of God still stands in all its purity. Thanks be to God! Nevertheless, how will it be when there is a male director? The topic is too sensitive for me and I do not want to pursue it any further but I must say that it is precisely this point that intensifies my concern for this work of God. I have had many experiences during the 20 years that I have been directing young women and I have reason to worry if the entire body would come under male direction at the head.

I know what spiritual jurisdiction is and I am certain that none of our members wants to renounce this, but we can no longer accept what goes beyond that. If the vows must be professed before the director, which is certainly implied, how can there still be unity when the order branches out? Where would the Poor School Sisters be headed then? Our unfaithful Rosa [Franz] certainly took advantage of the fact that the archbishop was at her profession, even if only as a guest!

I must stop here or I would go too far. For my own peace of mind, I must set forth still more counterarguments if I want to die in peace someday. This will again be attributed

to my pride and desire to rule. In God's Name!

If they insist on male direction, it will drive away from our community our best sisters—to whom religious life and seclusion are very dear—and lead them to other convents. They are already saying this. This male direction alone requires a rule that is very different from the one we have been living until now.

Oh, how much I have written and, you will say, mostly lamentations. You do not see the valiant woman in me and I beg for your patience. *I often visualize the Blessed Virgin Mary beneath the cross of her divine Son, Jesus, and I meditate on the words, "And she stood,"* but I am lying in the coffin on the bare floor of the large, beautiful hall.

I repeat the request in the name of all of us—hold out to the end and have mercy on us!

We entrust you to the Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and ask for your prayers and priestly blessing.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Your grateful,
M. Theresa of Jesus