



To Recapture the Dream

The Spiritual journey and heritage of Mary Potter

Founder of the Little Company of Mary

SECTION 1

Contents

[Beginning the Journey](#)

[To Jesus through Mary](#)

[Forged by Suffering](#)

[Transformed by Love](#)

[Words that were Works](#)

[Foundation](#)

[Go to Section 2](#)

Section One: Called by Name

To trace the path of spiritual growth of one of our own kind, is to find our own deep longing. To know another has gone before, is to find encouragement and hope and perhaps a way of living that will lift us - with our ordinariness and failures - to a place of giftedness and joy. In that other, we may find a meaning to the quest we hold of life and love, and all the hopes and dreams of God. It is to find a friend, who tells us that in the end, the one thing that matters, is to love, and love with no restrictions; a friend, who in her loving shows us Love returned for love.

All things lead to this, that it is God who first loved us, and our one task is to respond, wholehearted, to the call of God, who mothered us forth because of love.

What it is hoped to do - within these pages - is to share the journey of grace and growth to Jesus, through Mary, with our founder - Mary Potter. From the first, let it be said that she must speak for herself. There is no room to question, doubt, or seek to put a modern twist on things that happen. She speaks for herself in the language and the style of her times. She speaks as one who, raised as she was, within the confines of her time history, and social circumstance, and is both limited by them, and freed from them, by historical 'accident' on the one hand, and by God on the other.

It is the belief of the writer, that whatever difficulty we may have with language or style of expression, the universality of this woman's journey into God, transcends the difficulties of history. Her spiritual path enlivens ours, for if she, cosseted pet, child of a broken home, limited by her education and her social/economic situation, and the religious hesitancy and fear of anything out of the ordinary, as well as by her own psychological and physical limitations, could rise above all things and enter into the life of union with God - why can not we? Mary Potter's journey shows us a path to holiness that is available to all. This she knows. This she elaborates. And when it came time for her to found an order to do work among the people of God, it was this path she made the heart of the community.

The beginning of a Journey [Back](#)

What is it that brings a person into intimate union with God ? Is it a 'special' grace - given to some and not to others? Is it a result of a life of asceticism, and hard mortification, or is it the simple gesture of a benevolent God towards those people who manage by an effort of the will, and by the loving impulses of their hearts, to believe in God, and in God's loving providing, as a child believes - simply, purely and with boundless hope? Jesus said "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I offer you praise, for what you have hidden from the learned and the clever, you have revealed to the merest children" (Matt. 12:25), and perhaps it was because Mary Potter was a simple, naive young woman, who sought nothing extraordinary, that God was enabled to enter into her heart. Perhaps it was her situation, her temperament, her simplicity, and her awareness of being loved that let God flower within. She writes:

With the blessing of obedience, I look back and gain a good thought at once, for I see revealed a tale of love that reared a child to love every one, and this is a lesson I trust my children will take to themselves - that if they wish (those who have charge of others) to do them good, it can only be done by love.....

Sitting in the twilight which my mother loved, I used to hear from her over and over again, tales which told of God's providence in my regard.....

I would sit on the floor with my head in my mother's lap and she, playing with my curls would go on..."And you know, Trotty dear, I was confirmed a few months before you were born, and it must have been the Holy Ghost gave you your happy disposition." How often I heard that I saved my mother's life, as before my birth, consumption was taking her. Whether her account of her confirmation impressed me I know not, but I often find myself, in the brief thanksgiving of the Particular examen, thanking God for blessing me before I was born." (A.N. p.1)

Happiness at home was a hallmark of the growing years of the child Mary. According to the reminiscences of one of her contemporaries, she was a sweet, good natured child, with a touch of whimsy in her, and a rather old-fashioned presence. She recalls:

As dear little "Mary Potter", I knew your little saint when she was 8 years old, and a sweet quaint little child she was. Being a year older, and a bulky girl compared with her, your angelic foundress and another child of her age - Ada Stevens - had the idea that my knowledge far exceeded theirs. On confession days, we three went together to the Cathedral. The two dear children placed themselves one on each side, so that they should consult my young self about preparing themselves for their confession. In low whispers they, each in turn asked what they were to do. After the answer had been accomplished, the whispered question came alternatively from each "What next must I do?" When all questions were answered and advice followed, these two dear children entered the confessional in their turn. As a return of the compliment, they were willing to impart their experiences in the confessional. Of course, the innocent act of courtesy was declined. Many more trifling incidents could I write, did time and strength permit. Though of little value to the world in general, yet these little remembrances are very dear to old me. (Letter from a sister of the Convent of Mercy, Midhurst, Sussex, 22 April, 1917. Letters Series M).

Quaint and whimsical she may be, trusting surely, but also talented, as recalled by Eleanor Smith, later Mother Cecilia:

Miss Potter was a perfect Musician. It happened occasionally when all was ready for High Mass, no organist turned up, then she was called to play. I used to watch her feet, using those pedals, for it was a huge organ. A boy used to use the bellows for her, and one morning, when all was finished, he turned to her and said: "We played well this morning, didn't we Miss?" That boy had many a shilling from her. She loved the poor and loved giving." (Recollections - Originals. Mother M. Cecilia Smith)

In her old age, Mary Potter would recall her simplicity and naivety, when remembering her engagement to Godfrey King:

It may be difficult for some to understand how a girl in her teens could be as simple as a little child. It (was that Godfrey) was but another brother, and when, in order to fulfil what I was advised by my director - to be a spouse of Jesus either in the world or in the convent, in releasing me from my engagement, he said: "Mary is incapable of earthly love" - what my governess had said of me before. I think my engagement to Godfrey must have been unlike others. We were never alone, either my Mother or brothers accompanied us wherever we went, and I remember on only one occasion, Godfrey offered me his arm, and one of my brothers said: "Mary must be ill to take Godfrey's arm!" This was the greatest familiarity which took place between us. I used to think how nice it would be to have a little house to ourselves and spend our lives in good works. We could be like our Lady and St. Joseph. One day I told my confessor this, and he at once said to break it off, which I did. (A.N. p.3)

Happy at home, and simple to the point of naivety, Mary still remembers being formed by the family environment and owns the effect it had on her spiritual life:

What a grand work is a good mother! To my mind nothing is like a good home, not even being brought up in a convent by good nuns.....My mother was learned as well as holy, and it was beautiful to see my brothers, who were all fairly well read, appeal to my mother for dates, historical facts etc. I never heard a disrespectful word being said by them to her, nor even a disrespectful look. I never heard an untruth from their lips. It may seem strange, but I believe that part of my knowledge and love for our Lord was mingled with my love for my brothers, the youngest of whom was nearly three years older than myself. Our Lord was my heavenly brother, indeed, what I saw of other men would bring our Lord to my mind, for my brothers were very careful whom they brought home, and it used to pain me so to know most of them were not in the Church. These thoughts would keep me recollected, as much as a formal meditation. I would look at them, singing and playing, gentle and kind, and think they must be saved, they must be brought into the Church, and I would be singing and playing myself.....I had no thought of evil. I did not know how." (A.N. p. 4)

We might smile at the simplicity of the statements and groan at the theology that seemed to put so many holy and God-filled people outside salvation, but that was the time and the place in which Mary grew, and in fact, that time and place nurtured within her a longing, that all people share the joy of the kingdom. It prompted her to pray for her brothers' friends, and subtly drew her into an awareness of the sacredness of the other - the place of God. Her being loved led her to loving others. Love, however can be difficult to live with, and Mary found the possessive nature of love a stifling thing. She writes:

One thing I used to feel, perhaps more for my brothers' sake than my own, was the attitude of my mother. When little, I must not play with them; when I grew up, I must not go out with them. Nothing would move my mother on this point. They would fix on the most innocent entertainment of "dissolving views" for some Catholic charity, but no. They would be so pained but ever respectful. My mother had some fixed idea that she could not be too careful of me, that it was a solemn charge given by God. How grateful I am now for this guard of me which kept me from the knowledge of the world; but to me them, it was an unsolvable mystery and I looked upon it as a kind of hobby. Why should I be kept like this? Being delicate, I understood why my mother acted thus in what related to me health, and was rather glad that it freed me from school earlier than the others and I loved my home so..... (A.N. p.4)

This possessiveness and dominance of the part of Mrs Potter was to be a burden to Mary through long years, even as she dearly loved her mother. She writes to Elizabeth Bryan (later Mother Magdalen) in these words:

My mother is very good, but she is peculiar. She would not mind refusing anyone to see me, however long distance they had come.....

"...(she) has not the slightest human respect in these matters. The people in Church waited in solemn silence, on a Sunday too, in consequence of my being expected to play, but I, all the time, am kept home by my mother. I simply mention this, my mother has sterling qualities. She does not herself see that being 29 I might be left more free, and she tells the people I am obstinate...." (Letter to Mrs. Bryan, Nov 27, 1876)

It is easy to imagine the loneliness of a young girl cosseted by her mother to this extent - easier still to understand how God became an important factor in her life at a young age. Nurtured in a 'pious' household, raised by a mother who saw her birth as a divine intervention in saving her life, and surrounded by the strong faith of Irish domestics (AN. P.1-5), it is little wonder that prayers were said and devotions practised, or that a strong fear of faults and sins would live within the heart of a young girl and pursue her into womanhood. Lacking trust within herself, it would force her, in later years to seek constant direction, to ensure no delusions were entertained, and only when, secure in God's own love for her would she grow into strength of mind and heart regarding her own graced being. What we can say is that the ground was fertile, and, far from being a 'plaster saint' as a child, there was a streak of realism that was to stand her in good stead, when the weight of the grace of God came upon her. There was, however, a tendency to be a dutiful daughter:

In my childhood and teens, my practices of piety were from a sense of duty, as even (when) entering the convent. Poor Doctor Grant! He chose for me a convent in which to learn religious life. I thought he meant me to join.....It was not until leaving I was told that Dr. Grant had written to Reverend Mother of the great interest he took in me and his thought that God had some special designs in my regard, (and) that as I knew nothing about religious life, he had sent me to them to learn about it, and the different orders that formed it. But, as they said to me, they had not told me as they did not know about other orders, and they no doubt thought that as I was so happy with them, it was not a necessary (A.N. p.7).

Mary entered the convent in 1868. She was 21 years old, significantly sheltered and of a 'spiritual nature'. She had a deep devotion to Mary, but from her own account, was more concerned with doing the will of others rather than her own. Within

the Mercy community, she found she found a natural niche for herself. She was naturally obedient, self-effacing and seeking to do what she felt was right. Again, a docile spirit, and a desire to please her good God and Mary, to whom she was a special child, led her to perform her duties with a devotion that was noticeable (M.M. Hilda, Sec. D.p.4). Her sensitivity and self-consciousness are revealed in a statement she makes about her clothing ceremony:

I remember the day I was clothed, having a cross. It was such a pain to have to wear a dress which left me very uncovered. I was afraid of being disobedient in spirit, and all I could do was to unit with our Lord, stripped of his garments, as I had to go before a crowded congregation, band playing, etc., but it was Jerusalem below Calvary to me. I was in our Lord's arms on the Cross. I said after, that I would not like to go into my mother's presence like that, and my Novice Mistress consoled me, saying she would not like it either. They were so good to me, and petted me so, that I wondered why the same thing should follow me into religion and went to Rev. Mother and asked her would she not humble me. (A.N. p.9)

Yet she fitted well into religious life - Or so it would seem from a letter dated September 30, 1902, written to Sr. Cecilia, regarding information about Mary's time in the Sisters of Mercy:

"...she was remarkable for charity, humility a strict observance of the rule, and a marked devotion to our Blessed Lady. We none of us doubted her holiness. A Jesuit Father who gave us our Retreat, marked her out as a "very holy soul". Upon her entrance here, I remember to hear it said, that the parting from her mother was a great wrench, which was equally meritorious to both. I also remember to have heard her playing very favourably criticised (sic).

With regard to school work, she could not keep the attention of a class of children for any length of time, but could teach just a few beautifully. She was most amicable in her intercourse with the sisters, and when she was told that her weak health was considered a difficulty in the way of perseverance, she accepted the sisters decision without a murmur (sic), little knowing the future work in store for her. I have copied the following from our register:

"Miss Mary Potter entered on 7th December 1868, being 21 years of age. Received the Holy Habit on 30th July, 1869, left 23rd June, 1870." (Letter from S.M. Evangelist, St Joseph's convent of Mercy, Bristol Road, Brighton - Letters, M).

This desire for humility, and docility came from a consciousness of obedience and 'right manners'. But within that obedience was a strong sense of duty, and a 'fear of the Lord', which flowed over into the practise of her religion. Duty there was in this, as referred to above, but also a sense of awe and reverence." I always had the fear of God, and I dreaded receiving the Sacraments carelessly" (AN.p5). This fear of being unworthy to receive the Lord, and the fear of God's punishment for sin has lead many a person to a point of despair and scrupulosity, and whilst Mary did suffer from some scruples, she seems to have been lead into a spirituality that based itself upon trust and hope in God's mercy that alleviated the self-interested fear, and redeemed it into gift. It was not to be in the great things that Mary Potter was to find holiness, but in the small - in the ordinariness of pain, suffering, loneliness, isolation, household joys and solitude.

From the memories which come to us from our founder, there is a feeling in her of 'election' - that she was indeed 'called by

name'. A heightened sensibility? Perhaps, but in her later years she would see the hand of God hovering over all her life.

Dear Jesus, do I not know that unless Thou hadst led me on with sweetness, the unction of Thy love, I should not have responded to Thy call. Thou hadst ordained from my childhood, Thou hadst ordained ere my birth by my mother's consecration of me before, and at the instant of my coming into the world, that God, having chosen me, as one chooses a piece of marble of which to make a statue, or it might be more correct to say accepts what is offered to him - so God accepted my mother's offering, and then our dear Lord strove to make it less unworthy of Her acceptance. May He be blessed for ever and may the angels be praised for their loving care of this child of earth, who is more and more grateful to them. (AN. p.5)

This retrospective view of a childhood blessed by the guidance of God's hand was to be expected in view of what happened to Mary Potter after her return from the Convent of Mercy, but what of her experiences within the convent? Again in retrospect, Mary would write:

They had been most indulgent to me at the convent. The Novice Mistress was an old school fellow, and knew how delicate I had always been - not allowed as many hours in school as the other, not allowed to paint, on account of my chest, and never allowed out on wet days. But though they were so kind and thoughtful, it was too much for one who had never done anything, even make her own bed. God bless those good nuns, who raised my idea of a nun. By intercourse, by living with them, my idea was not lowered, but exalted, and though more than thirty years ago, I look back with the same love and reverence. (AN. p.8)

At home, contained within the warm embrace of family life and the comfort of Church and duty, Mary Potter continued to pray and seek comfort and support in her religious duties. By this time, aided by some further skills in prayer and with the background of some religious guidance, Mary spent the long year's recuperation from illness in prayer and reflection. Her love and dependence upon Mary, her fidelity and trust in Jesus came to a new life, with the long hours of solitude and quiet.

My room was to me a sanctuary, and I spent hours in prayer when those of the house were out at High Mass or Benediction, which I was considered too delicate to attend, and therefore had these quiet hours in what to me was a sanctuary. I remember the feeling being so strong - that it (the room) must be kept holy, as though there was a prevision of what would happen that room - that, finding they had put newspapers, according to an old-fashioned custom between the mattresses and the iron bed, and not being allowed to lift the mattress, I would get under the bed, and pull them away for fear there should be anything in them not good, (which I imagined there must be - as I was not allowed to read them).

I had always a lamp burning at one of the altars, for I had two altars, which my Mother kept up for years after I left for the convent.(AN. p.12)

This room was indeed a sanctuary for the pain and the loneliness Mary was experiencing. Her growth in the spiritual life being tested by physical and mental suffering - an anguish of soul which was to prepare her for another step of journey into holiness and wholeness.

To Jesus Through Mary [Back](#)

As a child, Mary Potter had a great need to be loved and admired, as well as a great need to love others. Of these complimentary needs she wrote: “ From a child, I have wanted to be loved by others, and to devote myself to them”..... (and) when I grew to be a girl, the love of four elder brothers and others was not sufficient for me” (AN.p16). This desire to love and be loved was, in the years within the convent and during the long convalescence, turned towards God and his people. Solitude is a stern teacher of the hungry soul, and the disposition that needed so much love and devotion “turned to God with still more energy to devote myself to Him” (AN p.16). So what happened to Mary Potter, in the long days and evenings in the solitary room she called her ‘sanctuary’?

It seems that, during this period of her time at home, she began to explore a spirituality that was but lately come to England, but which had a long and honourable tradition in the Church. Three things marked her natural choice in finding a way of developing her spiritual life to fall on this spirituality: Her love of Mary, her own simplicity and willingness to love others in that spirit, and her great desire to grow in the love of God. The spirituality was of course, the Montfortian spirituality we call ‘True Devotion’.

De Montfort’s Treatise on True Devotion - or more correctly, his “Preparation for the Reign of Jesus” that has been popularly called ‘True Devotion’ - had been rediscovered in 1842, and an English translation prepared by Father Faber of the Oratory, in 1862. Who introduced Mary to it, we do not know, but by 1873/4, she was herself preparing a manuscript (The Path of Mary), to assist others to come to love and enter the spirituality as she did. (M.M. Cecilia’s Reminiscences sect.II, dated 1868)

This spirituality offered to Mary Potter the means of preparing herself for the reign of Jesus, but making an act of complete abandonment. At the core of De Montfort’s spirituality, which is not for those with ‘grown up wisdom and maturity’, is the simplicity of a child. De Montfort wrote:

The Most High, the Incomprehensible, the eternal and all powerful has just now been born. Is it possible? The Eternal is a day old, the Word is in silence The All-Powerful has become a child. Let us acknowledge, Adore, Praise, Praise, Love and acknowledge Our God reduced to infancy..... whoever wants to be an all powerful king, according to our Master, must be a child. Let us then listen to a little baby, let us then learn, His sweet Lesson.... (Canticle xvii Ouevres Completes)

The pathway to spiritual riches, is the path of a child who is willing to abandon all things that he/she might be carefully taught and raised to be what s/he was born to be....and who else to teach the way but Mary? She is the one human person who speaks God so fully that she enfleshes Him....she is the one human person who has her own will totally in unity with the will of God. For De Montfort, and his follower, Mary Potter, there was no ambiguity in ‘to Jesus through Mary’...it was as natural as day following night. Mary Potter’s desire to be united with her Lord and Saviour would find an outlet in this spirituality - her desire to love to death, would find in the radical abandonment of self and all of self’s possessions a radical openness to the love of God. By being Mary’s, she was also Jesus’, for who can separate the Mother from the Son, the Son from the Mother. To see Mary, is to see Jesus, to see Jesus is to see and understand Mary - and our own destiny.As Mary Potter would have it

to her director, Mons. Virtue, in an undated letter:

“...what objection would you have to the devotion which leads you to try to live in as close union with our Lady as our Lord did, when their lives were one and He was yet unborn: to the devotion which leads you to be united to our Lord as our Lady ever was in soul, though their bodily lives separated?” (Virtue Letters No. 3).

Objections her director did have, primarily his distaste for the word ‘slave’, and yet, as Mary Potter soon pointed out, the word slave, whilst it might sound distasteful, was simply the willingness to abandon all things for the service of another...in the same manner that Christ had abandon Himself for us (ibid).

What ever the objection of her director, it seems apparent from Mary’s own words, that the practise of this spirituality, led her into a close intimacy with our Lord, and burning desire of her heart, to be conformed totally to Christ, so that He may live in her. Through Mary, this could be achieved:

It is through Mary (that) all comes to me. I was named after her alone. I was given to her by Dr. Grant’s wish; later on, I had your permission (for which I pray God to reward you) to give myself to her for time and eternity. Since then, what my Mother has given me could not be told. But I must say this, that the answers to prayer (and I have only wished) are more like what are read in the lives of saints. If others consecrate themselves in the same way, they would find the same. I must say that in her honour. (Letter to M. Virtue, No. 3. p.8)

The answers to her prayers surely came - even when they were ‘only wishes’, but the great reality of this statement is that Mary Potter was entering upon the great mystery of love. God did not simply take her up and act upon her - she was not passive. From her consistent and committed battering of heaven and from the concentration of the will on the abandonment asked for by the simple act of renewing again with full mind and heart the Baptismal promises of renunciation and dedication, and by a total “no holds barred” given over of self and all one had or could ever have, Mary Potter fulfilled the great requirement of Love: To die to self. Oh, not all at once, but willingly and consistently, through suffering and pain. In this, she fulfilled the requirements of a real life of union, as Tauler the great Dominican scholar of the fourteenth century points out: “If you wish to be transformed into God, then you must strip yourself of yourself...”(Davis, O., God Within, 1988, p 93).

Through her intense and often painful struggle to grow into Christ, through the abandonment of her whole self, Mary was preparing for that for which all human souls are created - a wondrous visitation, and God indeed visited her, and filled her with his love. He would also reveal to her the path she herself was to follow, in making the kingdom a reality on earth.

The quick impression on the eyes of my soul of Jesus Crucified. The Divine Will manifesting itself to me in the most mysterious manner. The work of Calvary. The impress made in a most mysterious manner but it would seem in the same way as molten wax receives the Divine Impress, and so it continued, God deigning to let the echo of his voice sound in my soul. “It is my will that you do this work. Honour the Heart of My Mother, and when in anguish, I will come and comfort you”. And on our Lady’s birthday some forty years ago He came, dear Jesus, in His own sweet way, making earth seem heaven. (ON. V.5 p7)

As she reflects upon the wonder of her prayer life over the during the years 1872-76, she finds herself caught up in mystery. What words are there to express the wonders of God's love revealed to a simple soul:

The facts that show the Divine origin of the Little Company of Mary, I find myself reluctant to write upon. I hover near it, I commence to speak of my room, intending to speak of God's visits and the wonderful favours He there accorded me. One thing (as I am allowed to write freely, just as the thoughts come into my mind), treasure that crucifix. It was not in my room, but in the quiet parlour, which for hours would be as silent as a Trappist Monastery. My sofa was opposite that crucifix, and with all the world shut out, knowing little that was going on in it, I remember, in obedience, writing that first little book, the Path of Mary.....”(AN. p12).

The wonders that were revealed to her in that little room were intense and revelatory. Here was she graced with mystical experiences, which drew her into an irrevocable relationship with Christ, revealed to her, over a period of time, an amazing outpouring of wisdom, grace and love, which filled her full to over-flowing.

What were those experiences? In the first instance, she writes of an intense, mystical experience of God, and of finding in that experience, her true self:

God visited my room with a series of marvels, and, simple as I was, unread in mystical theology, or even ordinary writings upon devotion, still I knew that God's manifestations to me meant something great, something indeed of moment.

How speak of that marvellous visit - that Presence! The question of the little atom - the answer of the Creator "the Blessed Trinity who made Thee". Then, the way of the Cross made in that rapturous presence. How go back and relate these things I do not know! (ON. Vol. 5, p12).

Here is the first encounter - the awesome Presence of God, and the bursting recognition of being at one with the Creator - the overwhelming understanding from whom she came, to whom she is all in all. There is a breathlessness here....a rapture and delighting that enhanced and made sense of all that had gone before. The sense of God and things spiritual that she had as a child and teenager blossomed forth:

after the wonderful visit God made me, when He first spoke to me it (my happiness) grew greater, and the very air seemed to breathe of joy, like the garden of Eden.

I was too shy to speak to my confessor, so I wrote - and the remarkable thing is certain that I knew not what was coming, but week after week, the whole plan of the Little Company of Mary was gradually unfolded, one feature after another. It made a complete plan, that had nothing to do with my mind.....

.....returning to the manifestation God made to me, it went on for some months, certainly not discouraged by my confessor. (Extract from Private Notes of the Founder, copied by M.M. Cecilia dated 1902)

What had prepared Mary Potter for this experience of God? Nothing but the ordinariness of human life, the humdrum things of home and family and friends, and a spirit that was by nature introverted and shy - yet always loving, and desiring to be

loved. What prepared it also was the solitary life, forced on Mary by a delicate constitution,(and an overprotective mother), and from the practice of a spiritual path which was one of total abandonment - even to the Cross.Mary did not run from her encounter with her Lord. Part of her feared that it was delusion, but, staying truly open to the God who called, with that humility, docility and simplicity so characteristic of the person, she was led to further experiences and infusion of grace. Writing of the period in her Obedience Notes, she gives the flow of graces that came upon her, and would continue to touch her soul:

“How did I dwell with thee, my mother, as in a calm sweet sanctuary, living by thy very breath: it seemed thy heart animated mine. I assure you, my Father, on different feasts, I passed into different stages of the spiritual life, as though I was with the infant Jesus, my arms around Mary’s neck, or I nestled into her bosom and fed upon her substance.

From the mystical birth, through the hidden life, the public life, on to Calvary, step by step the way of the Cross with Jesus; and then, that wonderful union whilst, standing before that Crucifix: “Thou art my spouse”.

“Spouse of Jesus Crucified” was the chant of the angels. Washed by the Precious Blood, wrapt, enfolded in the embrace of the Holy Spirit. What has God not done for me? (ON Vol. 5. p12.)

Writing to her director, Monsignor Virtue, she tried to explain to him what was happening to her, and pleaded for explanation and guidance, Her encounter with the Divine left her awed and shaken.

I did not know, did not ask why was this, what did it mean? Now I know. It was the way others were to walk. May the holy angels lead many into this sweet way of Mary, to which God attaches such graces. It could not be explained, the union with God, the joy. The world seemed another world, and to breathe of God. I would wonder whether it was not a return almost to the original joy of the unfallen. I went about my few duties the same, making home happy, entertaining my mother and brothers, but I had many hours to myself. This union with God has gone on increasing, and is not disturbed by the various businesses I have to attend to, or by being very little alone. I cannot describe it. I almost seem to cease being aware of my own existence, God seems to have such entire possession of me. If I was to sit and meditate as some books advise, - to think, for instance, there was a time I did not exist, - it would be a distraction. I love to think of creation, and yet I seem to have been with God creating.....but my meaning may be misunderstood. Those whom God enfolds in a similar manner alone could understand me.(op. cit N.5 p.12)

Indeed Mary was to be misunderstood. Her experiences were not of the mainstream. Who could believe that God would reveal himself to an unknown young woman, child of a broken home, delicate, ‘over imaginative’ and subject to long hours of solitude and isolation? The common expectation of the Church was one of the performance of the duties required of one’s state of life. Intimate union with God, the mystical awareness of God’s communicating presence was not the norm and certainly did not consist, in the nineteenth century English mind, (or even today) to be the prerogative of lay people. Yet God would bring her through the desolation. In fact, it was part of it, for the darkness would thrust her more deeply into dependence upon God himself, and on his mother - it would take into the reality of the abandonment of the Cross.

Last Friday during the three hours, I seemed raised upon the Cross, and our blessed Lord seemed to tell me he

espoused me, but I took not much notice. Last night, Sunday, whilst going through the stations, I was thinking of Jesus being nailed to the Cross, when the words came.... ..I stood before the Crucifix where I have told you Almighty God brought me back to himself. and with the thought of our Lord hanging upon the Cross, I felt he was binding me to Himself by a new title, as his spouse.it is a title I have a repugnance for myself...I could be his slave, His child, the little thing He stooped to lift out of the dust, but not his spouse, and I prayed he would not do it, and then He seemed to tell me it was the wish of Mary, and when I thought of that Mother's heart at the foot of the Cross and likewise the thought that the nearer I was to our blessed Lord the more I could do for others, for His people and my people, I let the work be done in me, and it has made a revelation in me. I would wish to go away and cast myself in the lowest place, and be punished as I deserve, but I cannot go away from Jesus, for He has bound me to Himself. (Virtue Letters no.5 p12)

The espousal with Jesus Crucified would lead Mary into another of the graces or mysteries of the Redemption. On the Cross is Mercy incarnate. She is drawn into that Mercy:

In the day of my consummation, may I be found consummated with thee". Jesus I wait. Thou hast lifted me up with thee upon the Cross. Thou hast there drawn me to thyself. Grant me from that cross to say with thee "and now holy Father, I come to Thee". Soon, if it please thee dear Jesus, soon call and bid me come to thee. I am thine O lord my God, all thine. Thou answerest me my sweet Jesus 'thou art mine, all mine, thou hast possessed me from the beginning of my way. I have possessed thee since thou showdest (sic) thy self to me O Lord. Since then, have I ever lost thee? When thou wilt call me, O God, I know not. I wait. I have cried out from the cross with thee, Father forgive them for they know not what they do' and waited, and thy own sweet voice spoke the word "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise", and I rejoiced when I understood from thee of thy Mother's work - of my own Mary's work, by which so many that word would be spoken - sinners, dying in sin. Again I have followed thy voice, speaking to Mary, commending to her thy church: Woman behold thy son, son behold thy Mother, and my heart grew more glad to know that the day will come when my own mother Mary will be proclaimed Mother of the Church. I may not see it, the church will consecrate itself to her Mother Heart. (ON. V.1 pp.1-2)

From the experience of the Cross, the experience of the Mother heart of Mary, the union of Christ with His Mother, and of the Mother with the heart and mind and will of the Son, there came another mystic grace...the awareness of the Mercy offered through the act of impetration of the Son.....the Precious Blood was given to humanity as gift. Why was it not realized more in the Church. Again Mary was 'inundated' by grace:" My recollection is of being penetrated, suffused with the Precious Blood, and our dear Lord speaking to me and telling me he had given me His life" (Virtue Let.No.1).

The grace to honour the Precious Blood was not well received, but it persisted in Mary and became more deeply refined and restated. The blood of Christ was the source of life for us, the place of Mercy's great source of nourishment and strength. Jesus offered himself for our salvation. From the heart of Christ flowed the streams, the torrents of love in which sinners are freed from their bondage, the hungry are fed and the sick healed. Mary would write:

As the infant sucks life from its mother's breast, so let man feed from the heart of Jesus, and live by his Blood,

who shed it for them that they might live. Methinks the angels wonder, as they watch men, parched, dried up with thirst - and yet so near the everlasting fountains, the torrents of the Precious Blood, (which brings) to souls all that is soothing, all that the soul can desire, giving inexpressible delights to the being made for bliss and joy. "Come", Jesus calls and Mary leads her own. Drink and be inebriated my beloved ones. Bathe in the saving streams of the Precious blood. Be pure, be holy, be happy with the joy of the children of God, the delight and content of the children of the Mother of Holy Hope. (ON Vol.5, P.22)

In the last words of that reflection and revelation of the wonder of God's love, we find the call issued to this woman Mary.... and to us....Come! learn to look upon God....come, taste the joy of the Lord! Notice the presence of Mary, the unobtrusive bringer of Jesus. This sense of unity and union with the Mother of God is part of the mystic grace given. Mary reveals Jesus to us....the grand gift of the spirituality Mary Potter espoused is made a reality...to Jesus through Mary. In a beautiful revelation of this Mary Potter wrote:

The presence of our Lady after communion: My Mother!....My child! my own child. Speechless, silent, I simply delight in the presence of Mary, then I am sensible that our Lady has the divine infant, holding him out to me, and with a sense of unworthiness I half strive to say: Depart from me, for I....." But I simply say: Can you trust me with him?" and I fear, and again I ask, "Can you trust Him with me?", and I strive to think how I can be more recollected, slower, less hurried. How can I keep him with me? Mother, is there anything that hinders the entire reign of Jesus in my soul - anything in my mind, my soul, my body, Mother, I ask you to remove it. You are all powerful.....And He came. Blessed be the name of Jesus forever. Blessed his visitation. (O.N. Vol 3, 31)

As if it was not enough to have a penitent and spiritual child who claimed she had had experiences of being at one with the Trinity, and finding herself in the grace of the Godhead, and that she had been given infused grace of knowing Christ in Mary and experiencing within herself the reality of Jesus as person, lover, Lord, Monsignor Virtue is faced with a further problem... that of discernment. Unfortunately for him, he seems to have followed the principle Cardinal Manning was to use in a later episode of Mary's life - the principle - which is not in itself bad, is that if it is of God, it will stay, even if you deny it utterly! Mary Potter was about to suffer intensely, because in spite of all her own best efforts, and her own desire not to be 'extraordinary' in any kind of way, her God kept drawing her to himself in a most extraordinary way. She wrote to Mons. Virtue:

Now I write because I have been told to do so. God has put his Holy Spirit upon me. The Holy Trinity overshadowed me and communicated to my understanding, darkly it is true, but with a clearer knowledge than heretofore, how the holy spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is the Link of the Father and the Son. The breath of Life. That breath was breathed into me, and I was told henceforth I must live by it. I am bound to God by His Holy Spirit, in some faint way resembling the act of the Holy Ghost within the Godhead, and may the spirit of God now guide me to show you, as in the deepest humility, I acknowledge my utter unworthiness to speak this awful mystery. The Holy Ghost is the Indissoluble Bond, the limit of the Godhead, and we are filled with His Holy Spirit and bound, espoused to him for evermore.....(Virtue Letters, No5)

What is amazing about this piece of writing is that it is a personal experience of what writers on the mystical life speak of....a progression into the unity of the Trinity through an experience of the dynamic life of the Trinity. How can Nineteenth century words convey the awesome power of such an experience of God, or of the radical effects within the person. Here Mary Potter is describing what William St. Thierry and Hadewijch called 'the living life' of the Trinity. She seeks to describe the infinity of movement of pure love that is the Trinitarian life, and seeks to make another aware of the wonder of our participation in that life. Jan van Ruusbroec, Flemish mystic described it this way; "There the Father finds and loves us in the Son, and the Son finds and loves us with the same love in the Father, and the Father and the Son embrace us in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in a blessed delight, which is eternally renewed, ceaselessly, in knowledge and in love, through the eternal birth of the son from the Father, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit from them both." (Davis op. cit., P149)

Here is awe! when the soul is caught up in the wonder of the light of the Godhead, and empowered, within the limits of the human mind, to know God directly. It is the highest form of grace that we can know, and yet within the ecstasy the agony. The agony of trying to translate the untranslatable; to convey what words cannot describe. Here too, the suffering of heart and mind, the grief of misunderstanding. But in it all, the certitude of God within, and not simply in the self, but in all others. What Mary Potter experienced, through the pure gift of God, she re-states in yet another experience:

This morning at Holy Communion, it was said (to me): Thou shalt honour my Holy Spirit. During my visit to the Blessed Sacrament, our Lord spoke to me of the worship of His soul for the Holy Spirit, of the burning love of His Sacred Heart, "Thou shalt love the Holy Spirit with thy whole heart, with Thy whole soul, with Thy whole being", and now his work is consummated, though not commenced on earth, except within myself. The angels and saints see that God's work is done, and praise Him as the angels praised Him whilst the earth was but chaos. They saw its creation in the divine mind. The heart of Mary, The Precious Blood, the Holy Spirit, with such then shalt thou fight and conquer. Good God, with these do I present myself in prayer to God, and the prayer I breathe to Him is His own Holy Spirit, whom He has sent to me, and I breath it back to Him, imaging thus the procession of the Holy Ghost in the Blessed Trinity, and God supports me, as I could bear the pressure of the Divinity upon me. Loving are the Holy Angels to me. If I visibly saw them, I could not more sensibly know their ministries to me. (Virtue Letter No. 7. P15.)

Here again, the wonder of the revelation of God...a work to be done 'consummated though not commenced on earth except through me'. Here Mary refers to the work that she must do...the task allotted to her by God. Then with wonder she celebrates the indwelling love of the Father for the Son in the Spirit, and her own participation in the life of the Trinity. Truthfully she now knows the reality that it is God who prays in us, and knows it from the reality of Presence. The Spirit breathed into her, she breathes back to God. Heart speaking to heart in reciprocal love. With this grace of knowing God however, comes the task of liberating others.

On Saturday evening, when I got up and came down, having received in the evening the gift of the Holy Spirit, I felt I ought to be away, and I felt too, and know, God has given me a great power of impetration. I must use it. There is a sense of responsibility in it. Souls are dying, souls made to the likeness of the Blessed Trinity are being lost. It seems as though they belonged to me, and I could not bear they should be taken from me, anymore than a mother could bear her children to be torn from her.....Those whom you would help are made

like to Jesus. It is God's will they should be prayed for...." (Virtue, ibid.)

Now the apostolic nature of contemplative experience becomes a reality. From her own experience of God, Mary is drawn to pray for others...that they too might know the 'delights of the Lord.' Her loving nature again expresses itself in generosity of giving. Her task becomes clearer...to save souls who are made in the image of the Trinity she loves and dwells within, that they too may find the joy of union with their Creator. This concern for the ones who may be lost fixes itself on the dying, in the Spirit of the Mother heart of Mary. Already the grace or inspiration is there...the suffering heart of Mary on Calvary...the mother heart that knows the intimate union with its creator, and the union to into which which all humanity is called.

This call to pray for and to work towards the saving of souls is heightened still more by an experience which Mary writes of to Father Selley, some time in 1876, after she has gone to him for direction. She says, in an undated letter:

Another thing I want to mention is a grace that seemed given me the year before last, on the Feast of our Lady's Expectation. A new love came up in my heart, which has gone on increasing and increasing, namely, quite a different feeling, a mother-love for others. I cannot explain it! It may seem foolish, but God knows how I have wept and prayed for those whom I do not even know, and how it grieves me to think that there are souls now in the midst of the world's temptations, who ought to be with me, but I have no house for them. You could not understand the intensity of feeling there is in me on this point, and I do think a radical change has been worked within me. One day when I had been praying "praebe mihi cor tuum O Maria", our Lady seemed to reply: "I have given it to you." I always had a loving heart, thank God, but this is quite a different feeling....." (Letter to Fr. Selley, undated, Series D)

From the graces received, Mary Potter is drawn further into the apostolic dimension of her contemplative experience. Being drawn into the mystical life, she is drawn to the whole of created being. She, becoming aware of her own being-in-God, becomes aware of the being-in-God of others, and desires for them, their fullness of life. This 'mother-love' - gift of Mary, the Mother of the Lord, offshoot of the spirituality Mary Potter was practising would become the hall mark of the soon to be developed Little Company. They were to be Mothers after Mary's heart, nurturing the Christ life in the souls of all they would meet and work among, but we move too quickly....the graces which were working their transformation in Mary's soul, continued, bringing with them new insights and an ever deepening union with God. They are, however, not easily accepted by Mary's director. Monsignor Virtue cannot understand and is critical of Mary's experiences. In answer to the questions, criticisms and doubts that he raises, Mary writes:

As regards what might seem extravagant to you when I spoke of the Blessed Trinity - is it not what goes on within the souls of all who are in the state of grace? Are not the processes of the Holy Trinity imaged within their souls, though all do not realise it? Do we not pray by the Holy Spirit though all do not understand it? As regards my union with our Lord on the Cross, "With Christ I am nailed to the Cross" - "I live, now, not I, but Christ liveth in me"...may I not say that? As regards offering the Precious Blood through the Mother's suffering Heart - I would ask anyone to test if there is a more efficacious prayer in this world, or one more calculated to draw God's spirit upon us.

Could delusion teach these things? Could delusion make you love others so much that you are almost sorry

when you feel your suffering (suffering of soul, so far worse than suffering of body) going.. feel almost sorry because your prayers, though more pleasing to yourself in happiness, are more efficacious when suffering? (Virtue, No. 8 Pp16ff)

There is a strength in Mary Potter here. Whilst the struggle to be obedient to the instructions of her director and true to her experience of God leave her in darkness and doubt, (Virtue, No. 2,P.4), there is also a growing commitment to the call she has been given to do what he did - save souls. For Mary,

”He (Jesus) left the happiness of heaven to save souls.....(and) if I had the choice...I would choose to live in imitation of our Blessed Lord and save souls....ever since then, my thoughts are constantly in the Passion” (Virtue 3, P.7)

Living by Mary’s heart, through the practice of ‘True Devotion’ Mary had come to know the Wisdom of God expressed in the person of Jesus. She had come to an understanding of Calvary, that wonderful folly of God that was enabled by an act of supreme love. Like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mary Potter wanted to make her whole heart and soul an outpouring of love and praise for the wonders He has done for her, and to be what Mary was - Theotokos - Christ bearer to the world.

It makes me so happy, the thought of our Lady’s heart being within me, and such a comfort to think that by it I can always please Jesus; myself (sic) was something so nasty for Him to be with, but with the heart of Mary, I now love Him and keep Him, and ever offer that Mother’s heart before Almighty God, pleading for her children and loving others, and seem to feel myself some of the pain that Mary felt which the love of others causes(Virtue, No. 2, P5-6)

It is by her practising this form of spirituality that Mary states she has been enabled to grow and gain grace from God. Again to Monsignor Virtue, who failed to understand or value the practice of this way of life, she writes:

If you rightly understood the graces I tell you God has given me you will wonder. They follow so quickly, they are so numerous. I must tell you what, however, you will know hereafter by experience. Those who practise “True Devotion” of De Montfort, receive graces from God on account of their being wholly given to Mary, that many saints have, so to speak, earned by years of labour. I hope you will believe this, or you will think differently of me to what is true. When this devotion becomes more known, which I pray God may be soon, how saints will increase. It is not yet three years since I practised it, and wondrous has been the change it has brought within me. (Virtue No. 5 P13)

This way of living in union with Mary, in order to make oneself more like Jesus, had lead Mary Potter to the abyss of God. In that darkness that is light, she had begun to understand the tremendous gift of the Incarnation and the ready offering of life by the Son of God that we too may have life. Led by the spirit, Mary had entered into the mystery of the Father and the Son, in the Trinity. With economy of words Mary herself sums up the state of being with God in a letter written to Monsignor Virtue probably late in 1875:

God is present to me, not in his usual way. He has replenished me with His grace. He has filled me with His love. He has poured forth His Holy Spirit upon me, and told me to live by It, and now I live no longer in myself, but He, my Lord and God, liveth in me. Loving Him I must love those whom He has made, not with my own poor heart, but from the Heart of Jesus that poured forth its priceless Treasure of Precious Blood to save them; from the Mother heart of Mary that was pierced and broken for them. My own heart has seemed ready to break but our Lady helped me so that I could ask Almighty God not to ease me, if my grief could help a soul in agony. Strange if I have been deluded by an evil spirit that every grace has increased within me. Strange that sorrowful as I have been made, I was never happier nor more peaceful in my life. Strange that I should see more and more my own sinfulness and nothingness, and grieve over my sins.(Virtue,10:22)

The graces that are here referred to, we can isolate: The wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit that had taken possession of Mary, so that she now lived within that Spirit; the gift of understanding and experiencing for herself, the great Mercy of God, poured out upon all the earth through the Passion and death of Christ; The longing, loving heart of Mary, who seeks to live as her Son lived, to bring all into the Kingdom, and who, as Mary Potter put it, ‘came out of retirement ‘(Virtue, No.2 P5) when Calvary happened, and was from that point on, doing the work of the Son.

“I would like to imitate Mary in everything, and it seems to me, if there were one thing more than any other that induced her to leave her retirement, after the death of Jesus, it was to assist again at the death of Jesus in the person of his members. It must have been an attraction to her dear Mother heart to help those who were dying because they were her children and because she saw Jesus in them.”(ibid)

Like her patron and spiritual ‘father’, Grignon De Montfort Mary Potter understood the wonderful foolishness of the Cross, and the longing of God that all his children share in their rightful inheritance. Through the Cross, a new creation, a new family spirit had been born among the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Through the outpouring of Mercy, the shedding of the Blood of Christ, all people were born anew - they had to be awakened to the gift - the living water - the image of God living within them.(John :), and it was to those who had a short time in which to discover that wonder that Mary Potter was drawn. To those who were dying. There was a ‘mothering’ to be done, in order that Christ be born in the hearts of his poor, lonely people.

The second area of development that took place during the time of great spiritual growth into union was a real call to what we could call ‘evangelization’. With a fine understanding, Mary realised that whilst the graces given were given to her, they were not, in the last analysis, for her. They were for the world. If such awareness and communion with God is indeed true, the natural corollary is that they are accompanied by a growth in love and loving communion and concern with all God’s people, as Bernard of Clairveaux wrote in his commentary on the Song of Songs, when he set out to urge others into the pursuit of love. For Bernard, there were stages in the growth into contemplative living. His characteristic emphasis was, that in the life of the contemplative, action is the fruit and overflow of this intimacy of the soul with God:

In the first place, we ought to have compunction; secondly, devotion; thirdly, a hard working penitence; fourthly, works of piety; fifthly, earnestness in prayer; sixthly, the repose of contemplation; and in the seventh place, the fullness of charity.” (Song of Songs, XVII.6)

The effects of Mary Potter's union with God in prayer, made her flexible - ready to act as God directed, though only from this direction of love. It was not a self seeking, but rather a self giving that was response to Love itself. Initially, it took the form of constant prayer for those who were, like the thieves on Calvary, dying. In the Calvary motive, the need of the repentant sinner for the grace of conversion - and Mary's witness to that were a trigger for action. The horror of the soul who dies without such grace and bears the burden of the loss of the light of God - as witnessed by the unrepentant thief, was the contrast. It was the pain of these - their own pain, and the pain of Jesus and Mary for such as these, that led her to seek them out, and bring all the lost home to their rightful place in the kingdom.

This desire to share the fruits of her own encounter and union with the Lord would result in two things. A deep desire to tell everyone how loved they were by God and a real commitment to spread the good news of Jesus. One of the real gifts was, that Mary felt that she could not merely show them the wonder of God's love for them by being an expression of that love , but also that she had a way for them to find what she had discovered. Namely a way of going to Jesus through Mary - a spiritual path - that was indeed for the poor of the earth. This 'little way' would be the message of love she had to bring to all who needed to become children in the kingdom. The actual works of the apostolate would follow, and were themselves based upon graces given.

The graces God was bestowing on Mary Potter were great, but we need to consider that against the high gifts of his presence, there was also the darkness of the quest. In Mary's soul - as well as in her body - suffering was to play its part in forging her into an image of her beloved Lord.

Forged by Suffering [Back](#)

One of the least welcome facets of the human condition is the reality of suffering. Suffering of body, mind and spirit, is part and parcel of the human condition. It is not 'of God', in that God does not, and cannot will suffering for his people. He loved enough and longed enough for his people to be free from the pain of suffering, that he sent his Son, Jesus. In one sense, Jesus redeemed suffering, by taking it upon himself. No matter what the affliction, Jesus, son of God, son of Mary, has been there before us - in his human agony and spiritual dereliction on the Cross, in the leaving of his friends and family, in the persecution of those whom he loved and with whom he wanted to share his life. Jesus did not remove the pain of suffering, nor did his undergoing it, somehow sanctify suffering. What he did, was willingly endure that the Father's will be done in him. Suffering may indeed sanctify us, and God may indeed be praised and glorified by suffering, but only if we can walk with confidence through the shadow of death, clutching the hand of God, knowing that somehow, somewhere, there is a point at which the suffering, and the willed endurance to not let suffering deflect us from the One, who is the one thing necessary, becomes less something that is to be endured, and more something which may be offered as a participation in the joy of the Lord. The suffering does not disintegrate, but we become less emotionally and physically debilitated by it, or indeed, dependent upon it.

Mary Potter knew suffering. Not simply suffering of a body that was often in pain, but the suffering of mind and heart that was sometimes due to the persecution of others, sometimes to the feeling of being abandoned by God, abandoned by friends.

Sometimes she suffered from the hyper-sensitivity of her own soul to the evils that seemed to surround her at any given time. Yet, all through her suffering, there seems to have been a growth in the ability to abandon all things, even suffering - to let God be God within the pain, the anguish and the fear.

The very union with God that Mary had experienced led her into suffering. How could it not, for from those whom God seeks to bring into union with himself (and is that not all of us?) he demands a participation in the Cross. The gate is indeed narrow. Not everyone wills to enter it, for to enter into that sign of contradiction is to enter into a freely chosen willingness to suffer. Writing to Elizabeth Bryan, later to be Mother Magdalen in the first Little Company, Mary Potter wrote:

I do so feel for what you have gone through. I understand that wretched feeling of groping in the dark and seeing no way out.....Though so painful, it is no doubt most salutary to the soul, fortifying it for what it must have to bear if it is going to take up the Cross and follow Jesus. As regards our sensible feelings, they may easily mislead us. I am so glad you are more comfortable, however, at the present - but you must look out - there are 'breakers ahead'! (Letter to Mrs. Bryan, Sept.12, 1876)

There was often darkness in Mary's life. In the time of her forging, as she lay ill at home after returning from the Mercy convent, she would recall some of that suffering and the manner in which she overcame it:

During this time of sorrow, I had only occasionally bodily suffering. At times I would think it would be relief if my body was in pain, it might distract me from the fearful anguish of soul, which nevertheless, I bore without showing, and did my few duties, which consisted mostly in going out for walks with my mother and brothers, listening to them, singing and playing, mending their socks and so on. So I had hours to myself in the day, and used to come down from my room as if nothing was going on within me. I sought comfort from no one, confided in no one. I have never thought in trouble that anyone could comfort me but God.....When my confessor told me it was a mortal sin to believe in these, to me, inspirations, God permitted this, no doubt to pierce my soul in the most painful manner possible. I do not think it could be understood how literally I took what was said to me in confession. The words were so impressed on me "He that heareth you, heareth Me", and I did my best, but I could not succeed. Then, as I trusted my confessor so implicitly, the thought was intolerable - If this was not our dear Lord within me, then I must be possessed. Then I would think, is this how the heretics feel when they believe wrong doctrine - they feel they cannot help it?

I would leave off praying when I could not help these thoughts, they were part of myself. I was under an influence stronger than myself. Jesus and I! That blissful union I had had, I was afraid now to give way to. I ought to have known that I did my best to put the thoughts away, and therefore did no wrong. I had not then made my vow to do what was most perfect, which prevents doubts about having sinned. (AN. p.11)

Here is the soul in anguish - caught up by God on the one hand, and brought to darkness and fear by doubt and confusion on the other. Here is the soul who has not yet come to the total emotional detachment from all created things and the true humility that enables one to act with power and grace in God. Through the darkness, the groping, the dread of sinning, the fear of falling into something that was less than perfect, Mary walked in a kind of blind faith, trusting that in it all, there was God: In retrospect, she would write;

God permitted me to have this fear of being a thing displeasing to Him whom I loved more than myself. Then would come the thought - surely is I were in such a dangerous state, I should be lost, but I knew it would be sin to think that, and had to put that away. All through I went to Holy Communion daily, through sometimes, I would have to go to confession first, through a scruple of having been disobedient, but I fought against that perhaps more bravely than anything, for I had a wholesome horror of scruples, and made up my mind I would go to Holy Communion with this uncomfortable feeling, rather than give way to a scruple. (AN.p.11)

Suffering, as we can see in the passage above tested the faith and the hope of Mary Potter. Her dreams and hopes and faith in the experience of God that had impressed itself upon her life, were being tested by the very agents she saw as reflecting God on earth, his ministers. Over the years of contact with Monsignor Virtue, there was a constant struggle. Her sense of obedience to the Church - in the person of its ministers, and her own perception of obedience as leading the soul into perfection were now in conflict with an obedience owed to God himself. He had called her, and had stamped his seal upon her. What was she to do? Simply endure, until God's time came upon her? Or use creatively the darkness and the awesome fear of despair?

....you (Msgnr. Virtue) argued that it was a bad sign when I told you I have no peace when I obeyed you, I spoke too strongly. It grieves and distresses, I feel I am trying to convince myself of what is not true, but the real grief is the thought of my not knowing whether I have our Lord with me, or am possessed by an evil spirit. I see plainly now, that that thought must be a temptation. The devil probably seizes the time when you have been telling me to put away from me as delusions what I have told you, to renew the old temptation I have had since a little child, - to think I am altogether in the wrong way. Almighty God's spirit would not cause the anguish I had only last week, when I seemed to wrestle in a very agony with the thought how did I know I was not possessed by an evil spirit. I must not listen to the voice that had told me "I am with thee always". It might have been the devil speaking, and my pain seemed to reach a point that could go no farther, and I cried, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me." (Letter Virtue, no.10)

In the vision of Calvary, that was implanted in her mind by God, Mary Potter found the way of creative suffering. She used it - not for herself, but for others, thus, the evil was transformed to good, and her own will strengthened by the suffering she would undergo. Writing to Elizabeth Bryan in answer to a query regarding her suffering from Fr. Selley, she said:

I do not say much about bodily suffering. There are doubtless numbers who suffer more. If Father Selley meant in soul, I can only say, anyone who has read the last years of the life of Anna Maria Taigi, where she speaks of herself as feeling as though she were in a corner of hell, of despairing of God's mercy, of being tempted to doubt there was a church at all; and these temptations coming at a time when she was deprived of spiritual consolation, would read some description of what I suffer, but even then would not understand it. I understand hers by my own. Do not think I am unhappy or have lost my peace. Not at all; those times do not continue. I am cheerful and happy. Regarding spiritual consolation, I have long disregarded it, and not noticed it, so the deprivation is hardly thought of. My happiness for years has been to know that God is happy, and in that, consists my happiness.....It is my one great wish to do the Will of God.....To accept everything as coming

from the hand of God is my usual disposition...(Letter Mrs. Bryan, Dec.1, 1876)

This ability to seek only the will of God, and to walk through suffering of mind and body, with the will intent on only one thing - the love of God, is the way of the saints. It is the way of Jesus himself. The Gospels teach the good news, that happiness consists on doing the Father's will on earth - as it is done in heaven. Here we have the foundation of the obedience that Mary Potter sought all her life. To be obedient to the call of God, to the one thing necessary, God alone. To this end, Mary would make use of everything that came her way, work to the service of God, that it may form herself and others, into true images of Jesus.

It was in the will that this found its direction: "We so often lose grace, by not offering up the many ways by which we are obliged to deny our own will, whether we wish to or not", she wrote to Elizabeth Bryan (Letters August 8, 1876), and it is this seeking always to conform her will to the will of God that purified her suffering. She would come to see this as necessary for those who came after her:

It is important that the first members of this Little Company of Mary should possess a great fortitude, and a devotion found in the Will of God, seeing Him in all the seemingly adverse occurrences because what seems to us adverse, may be in reality, just the reverse. Calvary itself was seemingly a failure, the enemies of God appeared to have it all their own way, but it was not in reality so! (op. cit, August 28, 1876)

Suffering came therefore from a variety of sources. not the least of which was her own timidity. She, the weak vessel, had been chosen to perform a work which would force her from her home and security, and bring her into conflict with those she dearly loved, her mother, brothers, friends, and more importantly in some ways, her beloved Church. She, who was "such a timid girl" who "did not like to come forward at all, because it seemed so unwomanly, so unlike our Lady" (Bryan Letters, Nov. 28, 1876), was forced into moving out of home, upsetting family, coming into conflict with the authorities of the Church, and finally, against all reason, establishing a new expression of the Gospel in the world. She was indeed 'disciple' for had not Jesus said:

"I give you my word, there is no one who has given up home, brother or sisters, mother or father, children or property for me and for the gospel, who will not receive in this present age a hundred times as many homes, brothers and sisters, and property - and persecution besides, and in the age to come - everlasting life." (Mark 10: 29-30)

Yet there was in fact another suffering that the very closeness of God brought into the soul of Mary Potter - the realization of the insignificance of self, and the utter unworthiness of the creature to entertain her creator. This is poverty indeed, and anguish, for how can the soul tolerate its own insufficiency, and receive with grace and thankfulness the supreme gift of God himself. As Mary Potter grew in the life of union with her Lord, there came an understanding of her own utter helplessness and barrenness - her own sinful nature. She wrote:

My God, why do I so constantly desire penance, and God shows (sic) that in the centre of the being of his little one, He, Essential Purity, produces from the fallen nature, hatred of itself, alone satisfied by penance.(O.N. Vol. 3, No. 103, p.48)

Here we meet a new suffering. A suffering that springs directly from the soul's union with the object of its desire. It is the suffering of the lover's own inadequacy to show love - the desire outstrips the capacity of the lover to respond....a new divesting of self to the point where one can say with true humility that the poverty of my being is all I have to offer. "Be it done to me, according to thy word". Such poverty can, and did, in Mary Potter, lead her to value penance, freely chosen, freely offered, as love's gift to the Beloved. But there is another dimension of this suffering. God, dwelling within the soul, illuminating it and forming it 'wonderous fair', permits the soul to see that this is the reason for its being.....there is no other purpose for being human, but to be the repository of God, to give Him glory and honour and praise, and to be for him a pure vessel, reflecting of his glory. The double knowledge of God dwelling within the soul, the union of Presence, and the realization that it is for this that we are made, makes the soul forgetful of itself, it thirsts for suffering, rejoices in persecution and experiences a great zeal for the salvation of souls.

Whilst I do penance as a sinner, my Jesus, how thou dost stoop to me and embrace me, pressing me in the wounded arms, drawing me to thy sacred, suffering heart, showing me its workings and desires whilst on earth. Why is this? That our hearts may be in accord. My Jesus, I see the throbs of thy sacred heart, the pulsations of thy blood, longing to be shed. Jesus, ever offering thy blood for thy loved ones, my Jesus, let me unite every pulsation. When in pain, in penance, the coursing of my blood, in my veins, I unite with thee. Jesus, what can I do for that beautiful human family, lovely in its variety, its various offices on earth. Jesus, I would help. Let me suffer for each, I commence with the children of this age. Let me bear punishment for those who brook not control, correction,(O.N. Vol. 3. No. 110, p51)

Here again we see the heart and soul of the woman, called by name into relationship with her Lord, bound to him by ties of love and also by ties of longing that as he gave his all for her and for the world the Father made, so should she. If she was indeed to be Mary's own, with her heart and mind intent on one thing only, the reign of Christ in the world, then there was nothing she was not prepared to undergo, nothing she was not prepared to do, that all the world may come to know the Father, and Jesus Christ, whom he had sent.

With her constant emphasis on having the same unity of purpose that Mary, the Mother of Jesus had, Mary Potter sought always to say "fiat" - and more than that - for she desired always also to say "ecce" - behold, I come to do your will O Lord - even unto death.

Transformed by Love  [Back](#)

Encompassed by God, drawn into the wonderful creating power of the Trinity, finding herself as a part of God, and other human beings as like parts to herself, there is wonder and awe in the consideration of Mary Potter, that she, the whole of the human family and the world which God himself created, were 'charged with the grandeur of God.'

The task of the world, and all its people, is to glorify God, the 'All Mighty creator'. From the moment of her revelation of 'the Blessed Trinity who made thee', Mary Potter was drawn into the sheer wonder of God's merciful love - his great beneficence in giving the gift of His Son, and the great mercy and compassion of the Son in giving his Blood, his life for the saving and the sanctifying of the world. From this encounter a spirit of joy and compassion sprang up in Mary's heart:

After God's visit, what a wonderful new spirit rose in me. I had been a very happy child, also girlhood gave me my heart's desire - the world smiled on me. But a spirit of joy came upon me after the visit of the Ever Blessed Trinity, a spirit of joy indescribable, and what, in thinking over it even as I now possess it, I should say, it is a reflection of the joy that came into the world with its creation. It is not spasmodic joy, coming at prayer or at intervals, but a constant joy, a pleasure in all around, a pleasure from sights and sounds. How to express it is difficult. Many rise to the song of a bird, and to sweet music, but my soul rejoices as I look upon a poor workman, as I hear the singing of a machine.

How yesterday did my soul melt as the poor old charity men hobbled, candle in hand after our Lord - and delighted in the consecrated virgin, the Sister of Charity, ministering and walking with them. This joy, it seems to me, makes sorrow more poignant, but they can and do exist together, though the sorrow, at times, is most sensible. The sound of a saw or a machine, the wind, the wet, each have their own special joy - a joy which (as far as I know,) is not shown, but the soul wells up and we wonder that fallen creatures taste whilst still in a fallen world, such joy that makes the soul sink into deeper and deeper insignificance, and knowledge of its own unworthiness.

Joy opens the mind and we revel in God. God's unfallen creation was full of joy. Innocence lost. Is then human creation a failure? Ah no - a new beauty arises from the mighty mind of God - REPENTANCE." (ON. Vol 5. p.2)

For Mary Potter, to repent was to sorrow for sin - not merely her own sins, but for the sins of the world which was shaped by God's hand, and destined to give him glory. Her task was to offer the suffering of her heart that mercy might pour out upon the world: Jesus had said: "I will show forth my Mercy in thee, I will show my Mercy by thee (Virtue No.10. P.22), and it was this gift that Mary would devote her whole life towards portraying:

It is to that Divine Attribute of God that I devote my whole life, and what is the visible form - I mean the actions of Jesus represent the Blessed Trinity. How does God show his Mercy? Jesus with outstretched arms shedding his Blood, his Life. (Virtue, Ibid).

Love for the Precious Blood, the gift of Mercy, burned within Mary's heart. She desired that the people of God, the Church come to love and understand the reality of the gift, to make reparation for the ways in which so many turn away from that source of grace and favour.

.....could I wish to come down from the Cross? Our Blessed Lord has hold of me there, and the tighter he holds me, the better it would please me, if I were allowed, but the hard obedience I have at present, is not to wish even to suffer, this I find very difficult. I am constantly longing for a closer union with Jesus, and what is that but to suffer.....no one could know the suffering being Mother has brought me. If a sister is in a wrong state, I feel it in my soul without her telling me, likewise I feel relieved and joyous, before I have even seen her to know if she is alright, when the temptation is gone, or the sister sorry for the fault committed, and the more love, the more grief in the thought of what our Blessed Lord must have suffered when He knew so many of

those would be lost whom He so loved. The mere possibility is so terrible to us, what must the certainty have been to him. (Letter to Fr. Walker, May, 1879).

But a person can only come to repentance and renewal from the knowledge of how much they are loved. Mary had been loved from birth, but the reality of what love was came to her with the revelation of herself in God.

A voice seems echoing in my soul which tells me "I am loved". Timidly I say, "By whom?" Over me, around me, I feel the Essence, root of all Love - God. But timidly I approach Him, feeling my utter unworthiness. There are creatures of love to whom I appeal. They surround His Throne. Holy, Holy, Holy. Others look upon the world of love He created with pity, with compassion, and the ministering angels descend to earth with their heaven given gifts, and we feel that the echo in our hearts came from them. Yes, I am loved. (Miscellaneous Letters "T" P.140)

To know oneself as loved, is both sorrow and joy. The sadness at the knowledge of self that understands its own weakness, its own poverty and lack of worthiness, and the joy of being accepted just as you are with the warts, the bumps and all. Mary's own need of love was satiated with the outpouring of love she received from God. The gift of heart's ease - the cessation of searching and the need for human affirmation. Not that it stopped the desire to be cared for, loved, appreciated:

My Jesus, I find in my heart a desire to lean upon someone, to be supported, protected, therefore, as there is no lawful desire of our hearts desires, in harmony with thy will, that thou dost not give, you yourself has bid me lean upon thee, that you would outdo the most loving, most considerate, tender of earthly lovers. Mother, place me closer to my love. ...condescend to my littleness, sweet Jesus, love the work of thy hands. My mother, help me lean upon my Beloved. (ON. "A", p.20)

For Mary Potter, there was only God. There was only God and the promise that He held out to all who were willing to place themselves in his hands, to following him in all things:

What would any creature on earth desire, if they knew how their creator loved them? What heart could wish greater love if it realised but a little of thy love, my Jesus: Who would feel lonely, knowing thou art ever near. Who would want someone to lean upon? Not the one whom the angels watch from their heavenly home, and see walking in the desert of this world, leaning on the arm of their beloved. That one is coming up from the desert. Yes, on to the home of her beloved is she hastening. She is going direct. He is leading her and leaning on him, she feels no weight. She is strong, leaning on his protecting arm, which she knows will never fail her. She leans upon him, and her steps are blessed.(op. cit).

This is the place of the beloved of Jesus - by his side in all things, resting on him. The self committed to the single-hearted love of Christ, secure in him and him alone. The human elements remain, the pain, the loneliness and the human longing for togetherness, but the offering is self. This is the union of those who vow themselves to live for God alone. This is the place of utmost pleasure, and the touch of pain. But, in it all,

The world is not weary to her, for she walks, works for him alone. She rests upon him with content, she knows he will not withdraw to let her fall. Jesus invisible guides the steps of his child, and awaits the moment when he may manifest himself to her and show to the angels the fruit of his passion, and crown her in the heaven above, where the Eternal Father and the Holy Spirit will receive and bless her for ever.(ibid).

The single-minded passion of the one committed to Christ is the echo of Mary's fiat - a voluntary "ecce ancilla domine", freely given and assented to: perhaps in the shadow of the wings of the spirit, but with boundless hope and trust. Bound to Jesus Crucified, there would be darkness, there would be suffering :-

We have chosen suffering as our portion as spouses of Christ crucified. Spouse of Christ crucified! What does it mean? Look it in the face. See rather, in the face of Jesus on the Cross what it means....It means, when the limbs ache and there is not rest they must be united with the limbs of Jesus aching on the Cross, when the pains shoot and fever burns in the veins and the hands are hot and the tongue parched, all this must be offered to dear Jesus. It is the portion of the spouse. The throbbing head must rest on the thorn crowned head. it will not rest there, but it will give glory to dear Jesus, and be encouraged to suffer on without rest, without comfort, waiting God's time for relief....and with our agonies of soul) we must ...stand bravely....we throw ourselves out on others and enter more into their joys and sorrows and spread peace around from our breaking hearts, and it is well, we wish it so, since the most high wishes it, and we ask not for relief. It comes. We could scarcely live long if we had not relief. The relief comes, and we are grateful, as our Mother (was) at the Resurrection, and we know whether in sorrow or in joy, all must be for the glory of God.....(ibid)

How well this woman knew the cost of being disciple. How well she understood the harsh reality of the Cross. How well too, she understood the joy of being filled by that Lord, when all is stripped away that would block the union God desires for his people.

Jesus, live in my soul and let not my body drag me from thee, but may my maladies be received in the spirit and for the end that thou hast sent them. Thou will not send more than I can bear. Yes dear Lord, you will, you do let me remember (that) it is yourself, your grace, by which alone I can bear. Leave me not to myself, I pray thee.

"Come my child", and the child is strengthened at Jesus' wounded side. Let me remain Lord, my love, and give to Mine. May they suck strength and sweetness, as I whom thou hast so favoured. I have all when I am with thee, strengthened by this most sweet Precious Blood. In the calm sanctuary of thy wounded side, there is the stillness that breathes of another world. Let me not leave thee. I will work with thee and thy Precious Blood will bless the little that I can do for thee.(ibid)

United with the beloved by bonds of prayer, sacrifice, penance and a strong, loving, reparatory life, that would suffer all for Jesus, Mary was immersed in desire to do the will of the Father in all things. There was nothing that could not be done for the beloved; No one that could not be loved, for they were images of that beloved. There was no task, no moment that could not be made blessed and creative for the joy of the Lord. She yearned that what she had found in Christ through Mary, may be found by others.

The spouse sucks sweetness from the wounded side of her Lord and loves all his loves. She follows him whithersoever he goes. In spirit and in reality, where she can, she walks with him his mortal life. She loves all his loves. Open thy heart sweet Jesus, to all my children and draw them close to thyself, that living, loving, meditating truly on the emanations of thy Sacred Heart, they may indeed learn its spirit and their works be ever unworldly, performed for thee, with thee, in thee. Daily may they search the recesses of thy wondrous heart of love....(AN "A" No.12)

And this will be the work of spouse of Jesus glorified. She will echo delighted, the emanations of the heart of her spouse, in his wondrous love dealing with mankind. She follows the lamb whithersoever he goes, rapt with the ever fresh and fresh revelations of his love. (ibid)

All things came to this, to love the Lord with all the strength of mind and heart and body, and to love the other with the same commitment: To her mother, in 1876 Mary would write: "I would pray to live not, if he wished me, but now I may offer my life, my death, for the work he made known to me to save souls. I do so gladly....(Letters "D" No.6, p.4)

Always to save souls....the constant theme of Mary Potter - to save souls, to save sinners dying, to bring the lights of God's goodness into the hearts of human beings created in his image and likeness. This was the task of one who was called to be a 'mother after Mary's heart':

Mother, look upon earth's fields ripe to harvest. See thy flocks. See the wandering sheep and lambs. See the homeless, friendless. Mother, my heart feels more for the friendless. than even the loved poor. The poor are not generally friendless., but, ah me, see the numbers of frail women who have no home; the governesses, servants, maids, orphans or worse - numbers of God's children battle on alone, and this is not in the Providence of God. He has designed otherwise. And Mother, we see the desire of thy heart to fulfil this want. Help us to put it into execution, and really find a home for the homeless, friends for the friendless., parents for the orphan. A mother continues persevering despite all difficulties, all loves. This is thy plan dear Mother, but into what hands have you placed the execution, we need workers, overseers. Mother, where are they? Bring them, bring them into thy service. Promise the payment - thy own sweet self." (ON Vol 5, No.71, p57)

From her growth into union with God, the world had become the wheatfield to be harvested for Christ. In his brothers and sisters, he suffered still. In the lost, the lonely, the friendless. and homeless, there was the image of the Cross - the suffering of Christ in his people. With the heart of Mary the Mother of all men and women, Mary Potter was to love these little ones, to search them out, in order that all may be brought home, to the love of Christ. Those who would follow her, had to be prepared to love with equal abandon - to nurture all who had need, to watch over them with prayer and penances for their growth and grace, and to constantly plead for them before the throne of God, that none of the little ones be lost.

But there was more than this. Each follower of Mary was expected to do what Christ did. Not just in theory, but in practise. Not one area of life was to be left unexplored....the sick were to be ministered to, the suffering consoled and comforted, the poor fed, the children instructed and the ignorant taught to love our lord, for

"Mission work is one of the works of the Little Company of Mary. It is very evident that God wishes us to be

occupied with his vast family, since he has so blessed this work wherever the Little Company of Mary have engaged themselves helping the priest with his mission work. What blessings have been attached, what souls saved. Conversions, instructions, united with our interior life, help to our own sanctification as well as to the extension of Christ's kingdom. (ON. Vol. 5. p.2)

Anything that could be done, would be done - with joy and happiness -for the people were God's people, and therefore Mary's people. Like Ruth, she sang her song of love to her Naomi: "Wherever you go, I shall go, and where you lodge I too will lodge; your people shall be my people, your God, my God; where you die, I too will die and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me, and more also, if even death parts me from you..." (Book of Ruth, 1:16-18).

Along with the burning love of God that had inflamed her heart and soul, was the burning love for his people. With the passion of a mother seeking out her lost child she would search the world and batter heaven:

My angel, whisper a word for my people, the people of my Jesus whom I love. They are mine, for has not the Father given us Jesus, and has he not with him given us all things. I want that people. I long for them to come to my Lord. What can I do? When, O when will they be one? My angel, whisper a word that will be a work." (ON. Vol 5. p. 22)

Always, she turns to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is not only the model, the exemplar, she is also the manifestation of the glory of God - a human realisation of God's own desire for his people....a manifestation of the mothering presence of God in Christ. Mary's presence in the life of the Christian, yet another expression of the love of God:

Sweet Mother, Mother, you are a Mother, you compassionate your child. You feel for my bodily pains. Your compassion is a reflection of God. When, by your help, I am in heaven, you will not be able to exercise your sweet pity. I thank you my Mother, for this sweet compassionate love. It is another link to God. My soul draws nearer to my God through you. You are a manifestation of him. He shows himself through you. Mother, how can I make more know this - God shows himself to us with a mother's undying, unchanging love. Can a mother forget the child of her womb? It rings through our hearts and thrills our souls. They melt under this warmth of love, the love of a good mother.....(ON. No.22 p.24)

If Mary is the Mother given to us by God - the mother of all mankind, Mary Potter is also clear to point out, that Mary has, as her model of mother love, God in Christ. She who was spouse of the Holy Spirit, who conceived within herself the Word Incarnate, was also witness to God's own motherhood, in the person of the Son. Like Julian of Norwich, St. Anselm and others, Mary Potter saw, in the event of Calvary, Jesus, the son of God, bringing to birth a new creation:

That look of Jesus upon the world for which he died - if it were not his by right, he has earned it. He has purchased it. He has brought it forth in pain and anguish. What his heart sent forth over Jerusalem, his piteous cry, his pleading, telling us of his motherlove, his desire to gather us to his breast. Salvatore Mundi - See Jesus, saviour of the world looking upon it...(ON Vol 5 p23)

What was the task of the followers of those who would be called into the Path of Mary? To do as the Son did - to do as the Mother of the Son did - bring to birth the new creation in the hearts and souls of all men and women, and to provide for them the solace and the support their needs demanded.

Jesus, it is too much. I am in a fallen world. Joy like this, what does it mean? Jesus, my own. The immense God is mine, my Own. I live not. Poor world that know not its God. And suddenly in the excess of joy - pain, piercing pain. And I offer that world to Thee. It is Mary's world. It gave you Mary. In the vast Universe, my God, behold this tiny world. Save it, my God, mercy. Let it be your own again. Let Mary reign.(ON. Vol.3, No. 33, p.14)

My God, how I love them (thy People). They are thy Images, sons of God. Save them. Souls, souls have cried out, apostles, missionaries. Souls, souls must be saved is the cry of the Apostles. There is a prayer more efficacious than even the Apostles. That cry is the prayer of a Mother's heart. Hear O God, the prayer of her whom you have made Mother of your people. Jesus listen.....Mother, standing on the shore of the eternal ocean, how you watch your children steering their barques on the river of life. Tenderly, anxiously, lovingly watches that mother. The children of God, intent, some of them, piloting their little boats, see not, hear not that Mother. Some are not rowing on to these Eternal shores, where the Mother, God-appointed Mother of all mankind awaits. Sweet Mother of Jesus, pity, plead. They are the images of God, and they know not their fearful risk. It is impossible to realize that dread eternity without God. A faint, faint shadow of that fearful future, rather, eternity, and that to us who live in light greater than the generality. This light is given us that we may help others, but they know not what they do (ON. Vol 3, No. 47 pp19-20)

It was not only the people of God who echoed his glory, however. There was in Mary Potter, a fine understanding of the gift of Creation. Life was gift; the place of living - the world - was also gift. To live in the world with truth, dignity and true humility meant that the world itself had to be valued for what it was - a garden given by God for his children to play within. Everything on the orb of the earth was given to reflect the wonders of God. The earth, like the children of men, was to give glory to its Creator. Not for Mary Potter were the words "this miserable world, this wretched life". The words were not truth; they reflected only the self interest of humanity, its discontent and incapacity to understand what Creation was, and the song it sang to its creator:

What does it mean? God help us all and give us sense!" This miserable world; this wretched life", These expressions, so hackneyed, so constantly used, not alone daily, but hourly - what do they mean? I feel inclined to write rapturously, "lovely life, beautiful world". Would to God we saw it as God Himself saw it, who so loved the world. This world is one of the glories of the universe!
Have I startled you? If you could rise out of it and (stand) in some part of the universe, you would see a radiant orb, reflecting Uncreated Beauty, brilliantly radiant with rays of Divine light lighting it up everywhere. The Attributes of God reflected from all parts.(ON.V.5 No.125 p.99)

The world was, as a contemporary of hers, Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote, "charged with the grandeur of God". But only the eyes that were filled with wonder would be able to see that truth. Such a vision only enters the heart of a fallen creature, when it is touched with the truth of who it really is - in God. Once we know ourselves, a little as God knows us, then we are

free in a wonderful way, to come to know Creation in a little of the way God knows it...we come to understand the infinite patience, compassion and joy of a Creating God.

In finding herself bound in love to her Creator, in having it revealed to her that she existed before her creation in the mind and heart of God, Mary Potter was able to understand, through her whole being, the meaning of the old catechism answer to the question: Why were we Created? We were indeed created 'to know, love and serve our God' to give him praise without ceasing, and to live eternally with him in heaven. Mary would elaborate on this when she wrote:

What is the object of this world? Why is it created and placed in the universe? What is the position of the human race? Why? To reflect him, to mirror his beauty, to reflect the light, the radiant loveliness of the Divinity. Ah, ponder. Is this what the world is doing? Are you, in your little circumference striving to do this? Has the majority of mankind this attitude? Even with the good, is there not a certain unhealthy tone as regards their indifference to the world, and an air of not minding what happens to the world so long as they get to heaven? Is this not ignoble? Does it show love of God and desire to extend his kingdom on earth? If there is beauty in the world, it must be reflecting the Divinity, and we can multiply these reflections, these flashes, reflections of Divine Beauty. (ON. Vol 5, No.122 p.96)

This view of the world makes sense of Jesus' own life, his compassionating presence among the people, his loving sensitivity toward the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, his awareness of the seasons and the changing colour of the sky. The world belongs to his Father - it too must give him glory. But more than that, the people of earth, they also give glory to the world. God looks to his creation to fulfil its purpose and its purpose is to live in harmony with the Divine Will - to live as Jesus lived:

"His divine eye dwells upon the beauties in the lives of those who really strive to walk in the steps of Jesus, who are patient under trials, who contemn not, when contemned (sic), who do good to those who injure them. Ah, these echoes of the Eternal should be continued - they might be, if people knew and valued the TRUTH (sic). (ON Vol 5, op.cit.)

Here, in this brief passage is the reason for Mary's commitment to the 'spreading of the good news'. If men and women knew the truth, they would operate out of it, if they were given the chance to come to their own beauty, their own loveliness. Here too is the joy of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She was the one human creature who responded totally to her Creator. Here is the mission of the whole Church, to bring alive in hearts of all men and women the wonder of Life itself when lived in the Life of God.

In the graced moments of her life, Mary Potter had felt the Divine impetus of love drawing her. As her loves were the loves of the heart of Jesus and the Mother heart of her mother Mary, she could not do other than work for that which they desired. There was the task of saving the dying sinner yes, but there was also the task of enabling people to give joy to their Creator by living the lives they had been created to live. This was the missionary task. And there was little Time.

We have but these few moments of time for seed sowing. There is the glorious harvest awaiting us. We could

scarcely believe the fruit of our labours, the pure wheat watered by the Blood of Christ. We strive to enrich Christ's kingdom, to spread it, to adorn the Church, the glorious triumphant Church in heaven. We have but the few days of time given to us and yet, though reason (when we think) shows us that we should lay up treasures in eternity, how difficult it is to move men's minds to be earnest in this. How often we hear the expression "I don't mind so long as I can get into Heaven". They do not think thus of earth. Likewise, it is not to God's glory the way men think of this world. We should love to make it beautiful in the sight of its Creator, enriching it with good works, imitating the great exemplar of mankind. Not hurry-scurry, just keeping within the bounds, perhaps giving rich alms or exercising some natural virtues, but the building of that temple within - the systematic striving after perfection, the daily struggle to attain what God designed and to fulfil the will of God.....This is not instilled into souls as it should be from infancy, the striving for sanctity. Children are brought up to seek to save their souls. It is put more as an extraneous and not an ordinary thing, the seeking to be saintly. Why, it seems sometimes, with certain souls, be thought unsafe, eccentric, almost presumption, the seeking sanctity, or, when signs of this tendency are discovered, it is thought to be a sign of vocation to religious life.....(ON. Vol 5. p.95)

With a fine touch, Mary Potter sets her case - from her own experience - that everything on the earth is called into holiness.... it is not exceptional, it is not extraordinary, it is the desire of God's heart, the basic 'ordinariness' of the human condition - to be saints. How much does she echo the call of the Second Vatican Council in its insistence on the universal call to holiness

"It is therefore quite clear, that all Christians, in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society. In order to reach this perfection, the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that, following in his footsteps, and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbour" (Lumen Gentium Ch. 5 No.40)

Mary knew from her own experience of God that holiness was not dependent upon state of life. She had grown into union with God as a lay woman. She had been given words of life and light that gave her to herself. She had, it is true, been called to found a group within the Church, but, as will be seen, the call to found an organization within the Church was not limited to extending the ranks of religious only. It was and would always remain, in the founder's vision, an organization that would embrace all states of life, and would serve all people. The joy of recognizing all life in Christ, the wonder of the realization that all are called into intimate and wonderful depths of union with God, confirmed her in her own choice of spirituality, and in the spirituality of those who would come after her. She would emphasize, time and time again, that Jesus and Mary were not religious. They were the exemplars of the truth of how human beings could live humanely.

The graces given Mary were what she called 'working words'. They had drawn the soul of her into union with God, but they were also to be implemented in the world. Mary would remember them all the years of her life. They were the keystone upon which the works that would be undertaken would be built, and as they were working words, they were dynamic. As Paul wrote:

“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him, no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4: 12-13).

There was little Mary could do except follow the words of the Word himself. She understood clearly that love demanded an obedience that would cost dearly. It was the same old story - “if you love me, go sell all you have and give it to the poor, and come follow me”. The utterance of the Word led her to the folly of the Cross. Like Paul again, she understood that “the word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1Cor. 1:18). This power of God’s word, combined with the extraordinary strength of Mary herself, would now lead her into the fulfilling of the plan of the working words of God, spoken in the depths of her soul. Her own intense union would grow and change - ever deepening, ever challenging, but always there was to be a sense of the Truth of God’s voice deep within her soul. There was a world to be won for Christ, a people to be nurtured into life, and a way of going to God to be promulgated and conveyed to all who would listen. This was the task that was to follow.

Words that were Works [+Back](#)

With the impress of ‘working words’ on the heart and the soul of Mary Potter, there was within her a growing sense of having to follow the inspirations that had been implanted. It was a responsibility that weighed heavily upon her, knowing as she did, that the graces received had to be brought into a living reality, if she was to be true to the call received: Reflecting in later years, on the task she had been given she would write:

Is it faith dear Lord? Jesus, faith is what we do not know. Is it faith when thou art here so wonderfully. Thou art mine, my own I do believe Jesus, thou has spoken this word to me, “Honour the Heart of my Mother.” My Jesus, am I not the hindrance to thy work being done better, thy word fulfilled. If thou gavest this mission to another, how I would pray and suffer for that one to.....

My God, what is like the responsibility of a mission from heaven. I do believe. “It is my will that you do this work”. Yes, Mother, my Mother, the years have flown since thou didst whisper thus, in thy own sweet way. How have I done thy work? Miserere: Magnificat. Yes, Mother, sweet Mother, renew in me the grace of my confirmation. Hold your child to receive anew God’s spirit, charity, wisdom....(ON. Vol 1A, No. 26, p.53).

A task had been set, and it was to be accomplished through the works of Mary. But what was it to be? What was the shape and form it should take? What was the foundation upon which it should be laid? The answers to these questions came to Mary, as every thing seems to have come, through prayer and reflection. The graces she had received for her own perfection in glory, gave the background. A society was to be formed which would honour the heart of the Mother of God, and make known to the world the need for an understanding of, and devotion to Mary, who was Mother of Jesus, Mother of the Church. It was Jesus himself who first initiated the devotion. Honour the heart of my Mother. Mary Potter saw

“that the dearest objects on earth to Jesus, were his Mother and his Church, and to his mother He confided the Church, and to the representative of the Church, St. John, he confided her. Then let Mary take her place in that

Church. Let it be known as hers, the dying gift of Jesus to his mother. (ON 1A p.47)

The society would be apostles of Mary. Their task, spreading understanding and love of this Maternal office through the world, but more than this: the members would, by their own practice of the Spiritual Path of Mary, come to their own perfection - and assist others to come to theirs, according to their state in life, through a spirituality of abandonment in all things. We need to understand that Mary Potter saw Mary not simply as an object to be venerated, nor as a person to be admired, but as a way of life.....a way of living life.

Mary was the epitome of Christian life in human form. The love of her heart no more and no less than the absolute love of the Father. The young woman of Galilee was spouse of the Holy Spirit - how did she become that? By a pure exhalation of love: “ Be it done unto me, according to Thy word”. The vacuum created by the setting aside of self for the love of God, enabled the Holy Spirit - the ‘breath of Love’ emanating from the Trinity, to enter into to her - to take form and flesh of her. The graces offered Mary Potter, which she responded to, prepared her for this understanding. From the words of that first supreme recognition of herself as belonging to the Other - “The Blessed Trinity who made thee”, she had become aware of the longing desire of God for her to exist only in relation to Himself, and in total dependence upon himself. She remained free to accept or reject the utterance of God. But the cost of acceptance was, and is, the invasion of God - the penetration of the soul by God himself.

This then was the experience - the working word - of God. To draw others into the single hearted experience of God, in the Holy Spirit, that Mary had received at the moment of the Annunciation. Mary Potter had been exposed to the wonder of the ‘way’ of Mary through the spiritual path of De Montfort. She understood with a passionate intensity, the need to ‘learn of Mary’, but she understood also, the gift of the Path - that Mary herself was invested in bringing all to Jesus. Her power and grace would work in those souls who so abandoned themselves to her to be “reborn” in the image and likeness of the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit: Perhaps the point is better made with a reflection of Mary Potter on the mystery of the Annunciation:

The Annunciation: I must stop and ponder, enter with Jesus into that calm sanctuary, as the Ecce Ancilla ascended from earth to heaven, the loveliest melody, the grandest chord, yet sounded on earth, working such a work. Jesus is here, close to his mother’s heart. How sweet its beating to the word Incarnate. All breathes God’s glory. That virgin heart, now enhanced with the beauty of Motherhood, is all instinct with holy desires that enamour the infant heart of Jesus.

But Mother, what we do we find? we were there with Jesus in the Virgin womb. Yes, the whole Church was embraced by the immaculate (one) from the instant she conceived of the Holy Ghost.....

The word Incarnate , born of her in time, she the virgin who gave him “peaceful rest” in her womb is honoured by Thee O God, in whose bosom he dwelt for all eternity in “unruffled repose”. May he take his delight in time in the hearts of those who love him with a special love, for they are nourished, guarded, cared for, protected by the mother of fair love, of holy hope.....” (ON Vol 1A, No. 11, p.21)

The Little Company of Mary would live this life of union with their spouse Jesus, by being as another Mary to Him who was Lord of all things....He could take up his abode in them....they would become Mother’s after Mary’s heart to Jesus, but not

merely in their own interior lives. They would do what Mary did - bring Jesus to birth in the hearts and souls of others. The formation of the members would be through the Path of Mary, and, from her own experience, Mary Potter knew that if the soul was willing there was nothing that would not be done for and with it, by the grace of God and the loving care of Mary:

If I might venture to describe (the various steps in Mary's way), I should say the soul commences its new life within Mary, it is then brought to birth and rests in her arms on her breast and is another Jesus to her; it grows and attains maturity, it passes from the joys of his infancy to the dereliction and agony of his Passion. The soul finally attains to the "fullness of his age on earth", is united with Jesus on the Cross, and therefore hereafter will attain to the plenitude of his glory in heaven. Perhaps many never attain their maturity. Perhaps all are not intended to, but at any rate some pass through these various stages...(Letters. Fr. Walker, No. 2, October, 1878)

This was the Path of the first members.....They entered into the spirit and practice of True Devotion, under the direction and guidance of Mary Potter and Father Selley, and made their act of consecration to Mary, and also, a vow of virginity. Mother Cecilia remembers her initiation into the little society:

In the early part of May 1877, I said farewell to my home and went to London where I remained with some relatives, and then went to stay with a friend in Spicer Street, East London in order to be near Fr. Selley (it was Mother's wish I should do so). He gave me some instructions on the Religious life and then a Retreat, at the end of which he consecrated me to our Lady, at the foot of her beautiful altar, and I made into his hands, a Vow of Perpetual Chastity. I fear I did not understand it much at the time.(Recollections of M.M Cecilia 1877).

Once the group was banded together, the Mission had begun. To make Mary known, to live lives of loving service to each other, and to the world around them, and to constantly plead for the sinner who was dying. This was the key role of the spouse of Christ Crucified....not to let one soul die unprayed for, unwanted. Souls must be saved. That was the ministry - the task that was to be accomplished. The saving of souls - particularly those in their last agony. This was the emulation of the suffering heart of the Mother of Jesus, the breaking open of the Maternal Heart on Calvary. Mary Potter would write of what she had been called to do, in a 'conversation' with our Lady:

Mother, dear Mother, guide me to speak, come close to me, overshadow your little one, the soul whom you chose to make known your will and who so unwillingly obeyed your desire:

(The Mother speaks:) I would that my children band together to honour my suffering, mother's heart. I speak not of you who live in my home. I speak of all in the home of God's church. let them join you in your work. Let them honour my PRAYER on Calvary, by praying in union with it. Let them take my place at the deaths of my children, and thus honour my WORK on Calvary. I work until now, I work in my children. If they love me they will love to be on Calvary, where I suffered so for them.

(Mary): Mother, we do love to be there. We will never leave that spot. We will abide there ourthree hours. Oh, sweet Mother, it is hard to suffer.

(Mother) I know it my child, I have suffered and if I send suffering to you, yet do I sweeten it. Here on Calvary you suffer not as they in the busy world. Would you go down from the mount where Jesus love has

drawn you? Would you be happy in the midst of the world's pleasures? Do you long for relations, friends?
(Mary) No Mother, no, I long only for Jesus, only for God. I long for thee Mother, I love thee, I suffer, but it is with thee. Strengthen me. Help, assist me. Why thou didst choose me, Mother, I know not, I understand not, help me to finish, and mother, let me not tarnish thy work, I pray thee. Cut, and spare me not, glorify thou me, for thy name's sake, for thy work.

(Mother:) Jesus give you what you ask. You need not ask. Wish, and then God wills and his will is a work.
(O.N. "A", P.8)

There was prayer to be prayed, and works to be done in this new branch of the vine. In the eyes of the foundress, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was the perfect example of the contemplative who acts out of her contemplation. She who had achieved such intimate union with the Son, would be, as we have said before 'forced out of retirement' by the Passion and death of Jesus, and by the Mission she received on Calvary to be Mother to the world. The Little Company would be contemplative and active in form. There would be a blending of life: An intense life of prayer and an commitment to service which would arise out of that prayer for those who were in need. The work of the sisters of the Little Company of Mary, was to grow into union with God, and from that union, and the contemplation of their birth on Calvary, act on behalf of the dying, but also on behalf of all the people of God, that the world may be won for Christ. How they would work and where they would work would depend on the needs of the world into which they had been inserted.

From their growth in the Path of Mary, and their adoption of the Maternal Heart of Mary as their way of acting towards the world, the followers of Mary Potter would come to act as mothers to the world. They would therefore need to be as Mary was - self sacrificing. The work that was entrusted to them was to bring Christ to birth in the souls of those who were dying without knowing Him. Like all mothers, they were to be watchful and willing to give their all, their works their prayers, their presence : Like their Mother, Mary, they would show their love for their God by the love they held for others. They would reflect Mary by a heroic act of self-sacrificing love, an abandonment of self so that others would come to new life, and whilst the continued prayer of the Little Company would batter heaven for the dying, there were other works to be done that were part of the 'divine impress' of the company.

But this was not all. The Little Company would have a conscious commitment to the Attribute of Mercy. Mercy was God's own gift to his people. It was his Mercy that would bring the lost home, shelter the just and send down rain to fall on the evil as well as the good. After the grace of honouring the Maternal Heart, Mary had been touched by another grace that was formative not only for her own growth, but for the work the Little Company was to do:

After that, our Lord seemed to give me a great grace, as it were inebriating me with His precious blood. The words seemed spoken: 'I have given you my treasure, my life'. Both the devotions (i.e. to the Maternal Heart and to the Precious Blood) were new to me - that is to say, before this time, (when I seemed drawn to a very great union with God, so that I trembled. So that the grief I felt for my sins and horror of myself were so excessive, that it would have been a positive relief to be allowed to do great penance and acts of humiliation). Before this time, I had no attraction to them.(Selley, ibid.)

Being filled with the gift of Mercy - the Precious Blood, Mary had to an understanding of the sacrificial nature of love. Her

followers would make their offering of themselves, but, because the stamp of the infant congregation was Calvary, they would have to learn the lesson well, that the spouse of Jesus Crucified, could expect the Cross, and indeed, should love the Cross, and run to embrace it: To Elizabeth Bryan (Mother Magdalen) she wrote:

Those who have to show a way, may first have to go through it. Those who join this work of Calvary, may be required as it were, to die daily, to lead a dying life, to be constantly offering up their lives, to show their willingness to lay them down if required, if their life, for instance, could be taken instead of another not prepared. The constant acts they could thus make, might be accepted by God, for the assistance of other without such.....It may be simply that God might wish me to possess and make known to others this spirit - to be constantly offering their death to Him and yet not die, like our Lady on Calvary. No one could but think that if she had any will of her own, she would have begged to die when Jesus, her life died. We must all try and possess her spirit, that it may live in us.....(Bryan Letters, Nov. 22, 1876)

Would you at Mass, whilst the Precious Blood is in the chalice, recite sometimes one of the hymns to the Holy Ghost, and have a special intention to obtain light to know more and more True Devotion. The Venerable de Montfort will likewise obtain his spirit for you if you pray. I know you are advancing, but I want you to do so still more. As you say, Mary's Own must grow in her spirit, or else they will not be well borne... You seem to think that my living would help Mary's own to attain her spirit, but it is God's own work, the work of his Holy Spirit. It was the venerable de Montfort's book that taught me the secret, but it was God himself, who enlightened me and make known to me more..... (Letter Mrs. Bryan, Dec.22, 1876)

The grand secret that was at the foundation of this spirituality was explained by Mary Potter in the reasons she gave for the naming of the first houses of the institute, which were called the Maternal Heart, the Precious Blood, the Holy Spirit, and Divine Mercy. Mary writes:

These are the four features of our Institute. The maternity brought us the precious blood, and the precious blood brought us the Holy Spirit and Divine Mercy.....this brings out the four features of Calvary - the Mother's heart, the Precious Blood, the Divine Mercy brought into the world, the Holy Spirit who was poured upon the church through the shedding of the Precious Blood. (AN. p.43)

Here is the plan of redemption. The theology behind the actions performed. The reason for the way we are to walk. But more still from the Calvary scene. With acute sensibility, there was in Mary Potter the gift of seeing that it was on Calvary the Church was born. Her contemplation of the Calvary - her reflection on the people who were present there, and their relationships with one another, led her to a binding of herself to the Church - and not just herself, but also those who followed her:

St. John represented the Church. Jesus spoke to him. Can we not learn a lesson and love and revere more our Holy Church, to whom God speaks his wishes. It is from the Church we receive God's orders. God speaks to us through His Church. The revelation God makes of Himself, his laws, is through the Church. She defines his wishes. She gives us the sacraments, Christ's body and Blood, His Mother. The voice of the Church is the voice

of God.

How can we sufficiently thank thee, O God, that we are members of your Church, chosen work of the Holy Ghost, outcome of the Incarnation. That church that was in the womb of Mary with Thee, my Jesus. May we be true till death, and may the part assigned us in that Church be faithfully performed. Mother of Christ's Church, receive me as thy own. May this be breathed from all hearts. Let the part assigned be kept faithfully. May we be grateful to be made use of by this good God, and may the spirit that moved Mary our Mother in all she did, in all she said, move us. (ON Vol. 5 No. 19, p.21)

Love of the Church was the only outcome of such an intense commitment to Calvary - or indeed such a contemplation of the Incarnation as a whole. The Church was born in the womb of Mary with Christ. The family of humanity was born anew in God through the Mercy of God, in the Spirit, on Calvary. Indeed a new heaven on earth.

In the world of Eternity, there was an Act - the Incarnation. Our existence as we are now, comes from that Act. We revolve around it. We are part of its glory. Without it, we are not. We are for it. All things go on their course and thus should we ever revolve around our orbit, keep our place in the Universe, part of the glory of the Incarnation, that wondrous "Act" of God, which cannot be understood by the human mind. It can only be adored. (ON Vol. 5. No. 20 p22)

An understanding of the wonder of the Incarnation brings to the individual, a realisation of its place in Creation - the dignity and wonder of humanity. God became man, so that man might come to understand the wonder that he/she is, and respond most fully. Mary Potter had already come to the understanding of the truth that Jesus not only came to save, but to sanctify the people of the earth - his people. She understood also what was now required:

Likeness to the Word Incarnate is then our life work. Some are called to greater likeness, aim at greater perfection in the state of life they are in, or embrace a state of perfection. a state that exacts a more strict detachment from the world, from lawful pleasures, a state that demands a nearer union with, therefore imitation of, the Incarnate Word. There are special souls called by God to follow the Lamb in this world, that they may follow him hereafter, 'wherever He goes' a special favour spoken of by the holy Spirit as eminently to be longed for, prized, appreciated as a special grace and glory, even to those who taste the joys that "eye hath not seen on earth, nor ear heard, or that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. These souls reflect their light in this world. It shines before men, who praise God for his wonders in the souls of the just....(ON Vol. 5., No. 20, p.22)

Step by step, the grand vision of this new work that was to take its place in the Church took form. It was a Calvary work - won on Calvary, epitomising Calvary. There was the Church herself....to be brought into an understanding of the reality that it was formed in womb of Mary, with the Incarnation of Christ. There were individuals, called by name, through the power of the Incarnation, who would take their place, modelling those who were present. Mary - the Mother, chosen spouse of the Holy Spirit, committed to the compassionate care of the Son, and by extension, all who were his brothers and sisters. John, beloved of the Son, intimate associate, counsellor, supporter of the Mother of all Christians. Magdalen, the one upon whom the Mercy of God had poured itself out, and who, touched by love, would now follow the Lord of life even to death, and then,

the holy women, companions of Mary, supporters of the mission of Christ. The focus of all these was Christ. Christ suffering, Christ dying, and along with him, the dying members of his race - the thieves, one who was able to own himself in truth, and thus win salvation, the other, blind and therefore condemned to die not knowing the grace that could have been his. Here, in the Calvary scene was the foundation of the Company of Mary, the family that was to take its place around it, and the task it had to perform. What would come from this was a vision of something that would be a 'new thing' in the Church - a combination of forces and people. At the centre, like the hub of a wheel would be the Little Company. Around it, the spokes, various groups and offshoots that would be an essential and vibrant part of its glory. All would work for the two essential pivots of the spiritual life - union with God in their own person, and the salvation of souls, that the suffering of Jesus in the poor, lonely, oppressed and damaged, may be alleviated.

Mary Potter had been called to begin a work that would enable people to enter into that truth of being that the Incarnation signified....sons and daughters of God. For some, this would mean - as it meant for Mary herself, the abandonment of all things. The embracing of a life of voluntary subjection, in the manner of Christ himself: These would be the religious members of the Little Company, who come to perfect themselves in union with Christ, and who were willing to lay down their lives so that others may have life. For others, it would mean a commitment to living out of Mary's heart in the world, in their own state of life, whether married or single. For others still, it would mean a commitment to a life of service and affiliation to their religious sisters - for their own sanctification and the sanctification of the world. Each part would have its place, each member would be bonded to the other. The religious members, dedicated to representing on earth the life of Jesus and Mary, would provide the sanctuary for all who sought to come into fullness of life - to Jesus through Mary. The key to understanding the plan was the love of God for the human soul, and the longing of God for the soul to respond to him. The mission was to make the world one - a unity of heart and mind. It was for the little ones of the kingdom. Its hallmark was the simplicity of love acting out of compassion, under the guidance of the Spirit.

To this end, she began to formulate the ideas given to her through the action of the spirit, into a working plan for the formation of a new group within the Church. She wrote in private notes:

The thought has arisen that an order devoted to Calvary should be the next to claim the benediction of our holy Mother the Church. Time will show if such is indeed the will of God. It has been thought that as there have been found Spouses of Jesus anxious to devote themselves to the succouring the dying and who have entirely secluded themselves from the world and offered their whole being to this object in union with the Agonising Heart in the garden of Olives**, so likewise, there may be other lovers of Jesus, who would desire to devote themselves to the same Christ-like work of helping the dying, but who, however, are not called to an entirely contemplative life, but would wish to unite the two and be present in person at the death bed and offer their whole being to assist dying souls in union with the Compassionate and Maternal Heart of Mary on Calvary.....

.....The spirit and model of the order would be Calvary. They would watch before the Blessed Sacrament as Mary watched at the foot of the Cross. They would watch likewise by the dying, still in union with Mary, and make thus the chamber of death another Calvary. Until this idea has been approved of, we can do no more than sketch what may be; therefore the reader must bear in mind that the following plan may be modified or altered in many ways, if not approved by lawful authority, but the present intention is as follows:

A Community of people forming one united body in which its members would unite the active to the

contemplative life, and hence have various offices to perform. Thus, whilst some are engaged in perpetual intercession (sic) for the dying and who are drawn by God to a close union with Himself, and are performing, so to speak, the office of the head and heart, others may be employed more in the useful work of the hands and feet. But by this I do not mean that the order in question would consist, as many others, of lay sisters and choir sisters. No! Like the sisters of Charity, there would be no lay sisters in it, the only distinction, it may be called, being that there would be working members, and for two reasons.

Firstly, an order whose spirit is to be the spirit of Calvary, and has Calvary for its model, must practise poverty in its integrity, and therefore the members, like poor people, must earn their own living. Secondly, there may be many, who, anxious to join this work of Mary, yet might be afraid to join an Order entirely devoted to Calvary, as requiring too much of them, and most certainly, no one could devote themselves to the mystery of Calvary without aspiring to the highest perfection, and, if they are faithful, attending it.

You could hardly live on Calvary and not become a saint. However, those who are anxious to join Mary's own, and cluster around her sweet Maternal Heart, suffering on Calvary, need not be discouraged and afraid that too much would be required of them, and therefore, prudently, afraid of pledging themselves to what they might not be able to perform, they may present themselves to be received as working members, who necessarily would not be required to devote themselves to the same practices of penance, watching, prayer, etc., as the other and more contemplative members of the community.

There would be less danger of making a mistake for those aspiring to the religious life, and yet uncertain as to whether they are called to the active or contemplative (life) there would be less danger of mistake in such an order as this, than in one purely contemplative or active, for they would find both and would be able to choose, even if they had entered only as a working member, if they so wished, or rather, if advised to do so by their Director. In fact, the best disposition with which they could join the order would be one of indifference, so far as concerned their own feelings, but a desire to know God's holy will by means of obedience.

This again is another feature of the Order in question. it will be under the guardianship of a Priest. To the priest has it been said by Jesus, "He who hears you hears me", and to him will the members of this community vow their obedience.

The Mother house, or fountain head of the Order will be entirely secluded from the world, and exempt from active, external duties. There will be the Postulants and Novices be trained; there too may those who are incapacitated by age or illness from any active work spend their time in the tranquillity so loved and looked forward to by the aged and infirm.

How many saints have given us an example of their final withdrawal from their ordinary occupations, some time preparatory to their death. They had prepared themselves by seclusion and retirement at the commencement of their spiritual career, and fitted themselves thus for work God afterward gave them to do - at the end of their days, we find them again retiring into solitude before appearing in the adorable Presence of God to receive the reward of their labours.

The order, being strictly devoted to poverty, must not be possessed of funds, but, as I have said, must support itself by labour. The members of the mother house, not being able to do so on account of the reasons above mentioned, would be supported by the other houses of the order.

When the word "labour" is used, it is applied to any kind (sic) of work that could be performed by the Sisters. A foundation would have to work according to the people and place they were in. (Emphasise mine: Ed) Teaching, laundry work, needle work, writing, etc., might in turn, or collectively be required. An objection

may be raised here that it may be well to answer. The trite objection of the monopolizing the various works to which single women are obliged to resort to support themselves, cannot apply to this order (if indeed, it can to any) since so many single young women will be, by this means, provided for, since a fundamental rule must be laid down, and that is, that no one seeking admittance, is required or asked to bring either dowry or pension, and neither would a large dower be accepted, unless it were to be immediately applied to such a work as building a church, forming a new foundation etc.

The convents must be built and furnished in a very plain, simple style, regarding the Chapels and Churches attached, what the Sisters would not accept for themselves, they may accept for our Blessed Lord, and his ministers, and hence, an exception is made for these. They will undertake no work in any place without the consent and blessing of the Parish Priest.

Feast of St. Paul of the Cross -
Mary S.M.
33 Norfolk Street, Southsea.

(Written 1874/75) (Conferences "M", Pp.1-3)

From the above, it can be seen that the dream was taking shape in Mary's heart and mind. From the early denial of her calling, from the years of suffering and confusion and the fear of those in authority of this calling to begin a new work in the Church, there grew in Mary a determination to seek until she found a place to begin. She would not act without acceptance of the Church. She could not. Then, in 1877, Mary met up with Bishop Edward Bagshawe, and with his permission and encouragement, the beginning was made.

Foundation [+Back](#)

When Mary Potter came under the direct attention of Bishop Bagshawe, she was welcomed into his diocese with little trouble. If we are to understand the willingness of Bishop Bagshawe to encourage Mary Potter, and to understand more clearly the impact this first foundation was to have on the founder, we need to ask the question: Why Bishop Bagshawe? Why Nottingham? The answers lie in the historical and social situation of the period and place.

Bishop Bagshawe was an Oratorian Father. His background therefore was Marian and his novice master had been Fr. Faber, who had been the prime mover in establishing True Devotion in England, with his translation of that work. Further more, he was the Bishop of an extremely impoverished and working class diocese. There were few priests to serve the people, and there was a tremendous need for providing spiritual and material support for the people. From the reports we have of him, and his own letters, he seems to have been a kindly man, enthusiastic, genial and very much concerned with the welfare - both spiritual and temporal of his many parishioners. Mary wrote of him:

The Bishop spoke about the responsibility of bringing us to his Diocese and then we have no means. I said I thought a few might come at first and open a middle school in Lincoln. He seemed pleased at that and spoke of the good opportunities etc. When I spoke of not liking to use the word 'order' because of Bishop Danell, the

Bishop said I was not in his diocese, he said “Bishop Bagshawe would give me leave to found an order, subject to the Holy See, and if I wanted to, why shouldn't I?” Or something to that effect. He was chatty and funny too, was in no hurry, wanted to hear all he could, took our rules. He laughed at me for thinking I could get Mr. Y..... (Young (ed.)) to Nottingham, said he would give him a dinner if he came...(Letter to Mrs. Bryan, Jan 14. 1877)

What Mary Potter found in Bishop Bagshawe, was a ready willingness to accept the commitment she had made to serve the needs of the church and of the world in which she lived. Bishop Bagshawe was in need of workers in his vineyard, and in Mary Potter, and her few companions, he found not only workers for the harvest, but the promise of an enterprising group, which, with cultivation, would increase and multiply. There was in this man of God, a vision and a dream. He, like the young woman who came before him, saw the needs of the Church in England - the need for evangelization for the people of God, the need for the care of the poor, the needs of the catholic immigrants, who were rapidly swelling the population of the cities, and who were not only impoverished, but illiterate, often ill, and living in misery in the large area of his own diocese of Nottingham. Bishop Bagshawe could not fail to react against the injustice of a world that left the poor to abject misery and lack of any care. In a pastoral letter he wrote:

There are few subjects more deserving of attention than the appalling facts which have occupied the public mind respecting the condition of our poor both in England and Ireland..... The condition of the poor in many large districts of London is as deplorable (as those in Ireland), and even far more horrible. The remarkable pamphlet published for the London Congregational Union, entitled; “The Bitter Cry of Outcast London”, assures us that thousands upon thousands of the poor of London live habitually in a state of filth, foul air, overcrowding, starvation and misery, which the pen cannot describe and to which the imagination can scarcely reach.....The houses are described as saturated with damp and filth, the roofs being dilapidated, the staircases rotten, the windows broken, patched with paper or stuffed with rags. The rooms are unfurnished, filthy and pestilential, and in such rooms whole families with grown-up sons and daughters have to sleep and live and eat, herded together like unclean animals. For these dens they have to pay enormous rents generally from the third to the half of their miserable weekly earnings. (Mercy and Justice to the Poor - The True Political Economy , Edward Bagshawe, Bishop of Nottingham, London, 1885)

The situation of the poor in London, described by Bishop Bagshawe in this pastoral letter, however, was one which was repeated in his own diocese of Nottingham. Like all other parts of England at this time, there was a huge population of poor unemployed, immigrants from Ireland, and workers from depressed rural areas of Britain who flooded to the cities to seek work. The lure of the factory, the manufacturing industries, mining etc., plus the seasonal work of the field workers themselves, guaranteed large, highly mobile populations within the cities. Nottingham, with its hosiery manufacturing, and the surrounding collieries was a natural stopping off point. But the rapid increase of population, here, as in other cities of England, led to overcrowding, poor housing, poorer sanitation, and the rapid growth of problems associated with all these - illness, abuse of alcohol, prostitution, child abuse, and homelessness. It was into this environment that Mary Potter came, and under the guidance of the Bishop, began a ministry to the poor of the area.

In a recollection of the first foundation , written about 1887, Mother Michael recalls what Nottingham was like in those early years:

In Nottingham and in many other towns, the working classes are chiefly employed in factories, warehouses etc., and consequently the sick are often perforce left at home untended from early morn till late at night..... The Bishop's flock...is composed principally of Irish and of the labouring classes.... They generally take a little too much on Saturday afternoons, and keep at it until Sunday night. The women are addicted to the 'little too much' as the men, and often more so.....the children want clothes etc., etc. (Unpublished Manuscript M.M. Michael Annals No.12)

Bishop Bagshawe had taken possession of the Diocese in 1874, and according to one account (Annals No. 12. |P.34) there were many things to build up.

His Lordship took possession of the Diocese in the year 1874, there were many things to build up, his predecessor having been an invalid and blind for a long time. Besides the Cathedral, there were only two other parishes in the city of Nottingham itself! Hence there was much negligence, people having to walk some 20 - 30 miles for Mass on Sundays. The Bishop began at once to open New Missions. Then there was a great shortage of priests, so he had to borrow these, many of whom came from Ireland, and were admirable, but again there were some, even from America and other Lands who were most undesirable, and so gave great disedification. The Bishop refused no one who applied to him; hence the diocese got the name of "Refugium Peccatorum". (Annals No. 12, P.34)

This need for mission work within all of England was fortunate for Mary Potter. Her own desire to see the Gospel preached and people brought to an understanding of their beauty and loveliness combined with the needs of the times. Catholicism in England was only just renewing itself, and the poor in particular needed evangelization and care. The vision that she had of the Little Company participating in the work of building up the kingdom of God through a process of evangelization and care of the poor, sick and suffering, would find its place here, in the diocese of Nottingham. Because the members of this Little Company, were to do the work of their Mother Mary, there was scope aplenty. As she would write to the members of the institute in these years:

See Mary with the young catechumens, see her at the bed of death, see her working away with the apostles in her quiet, simple, hidden way. In what ways may we not imitate her if we choose. There is so much could be done to help our overworked priest if we would.....

Then in our Little Company there is the work of instructing and catechising, as well as that which must always look upon as our chief work - the assistance of the dying. We should not be like Mary if we were confined to one special devotion. We may have a leaning to one more than to another, we may feel attracted to one with a special love, and thus it may be God's holy spirit that attracts us, but nevertheless, we must love all...It is the life of Jesus and Mary that we wish to renew upon earth....(M.C. P.115)

Perhaps it was fortunate that the Bishop had a large and needy area of work. It was an area in which Mary Potter and her small group of dedicated women could well be of benefit in the turbulent and spiritually impoverished diocese. The spiritual needs of the poor, their physical poverty, could be assisted by people who did not despise them, or condemn them for their

state. Thus the concept of Mission work was born in the Little Company of Mary. It was a work that was dear to the heart of the founder. One that she considered essential to the life and breath of the Little Company.

With Bishop's approval, Mary flung herself into the task of creating an environment from which the works of the Little Company could be undertaken, and the community life begun. The first task was to find accommodation within the environment of Nottingham. She found it at Hyson Green which was then "a country place, and not next to Nottingham as now" (O.N. p.18). She sought out help and was soon directed to a place and was told by a Mrs. Tacey: "There was an old factory but that it was not good, as it was a tumble-down place, but I pressed to see it, and so we went up the street and entered a place such as I have never seen before or since. A straight ladder led to the present chapel and by another a loft was gained above it; everywhere, bricks and broken crockery!" (ibid). This 'tumble-down place' was gift. The power of the spirit was with Mary Potter. The sickly woman of the past was fired up with the joy of being believed and shown a way of making the dream of God implanted in her heart, a reality in the world. She writes:

Now that I look back....I wonder at the grace God gave to one who certainly over the years of childhood was still a child - not allowed out alone ever at night, ever thought for and kept, as it was said in a hot house (yet) here I was wandering about alone, then sleeping in an old dilapidated place, in the midst of mortar and rubbish of all kinds, with doors that would not fasten, for I remember putting a pickaxe against it to secure it. When the Bishop after some time, came to hear of this, he forbade it and I had to go to the Tacey's but when I found I was expected to sleep with one of the girls, I laid on the floor, which by that time I had got quite accustomed to. (A.N. 1877, p.18)

Poverty was a joy for Mary Potter. The delicate young woman of the past embraced hardship and difficulty with delight. Had not Christ been poor? Had not Mary had to suffer from poverty? Could it not be that poverty, voluntarily chosen and willingly embraced for the love of God and others, bring grace? Of itself, poverty was evil, particularly when caused by the greed and domination of others. But, for Mary Potter, in choosing a voluntary poverty, there was the joy of being able to be among her own 'beloved poor' - sharing their lot, coming to understand their griefs, and therefore becoming able to love them as Christ loved p;

Poverty of being was necessary for those of Mary's Own. They were the 'little ones' of the Lord, and he would care for them, if they trusted enough in the Providence of God. There was a hard headed realism though, in that the infant congregation would 'earn its daily bread', and having lived at home, and participated in the managing of a house, Mary was not above making sure she knew where the bargains were - an attribute that would help her in her work among the poor.

I have kept house long, and understand the most economical way of going to work. One shilling a day is ample, in fact it need not cost that a head. You would be amused to see the great pot rice I boiled down to save time. it cost 1 1/2d. a pound, and is very nourishing. It is a pity that the poor do not understand cookery. The person I am with had been paying 14d. a pound for meat, now I used to get other parts which, when cooked properly, answered well, at 7d., and 8d., a pound. (letter to Mrs Bryan, Jan 23, 1877)

Again, with regard to living within the providence of God, she writes;

I have no anxiety about money for this work. I never had. All my anxiety was for the spiritual part, the blessing of the Church, to work under obedience and then I could work without any fear. I am used to money coming when wanted, though necessarily, if it were always at hand, we should not feel poverty. Never fear dear, but that Mary will provide for her own. It would not give me the slightest pleasure to have riches; it is so much happier to depend upon God. (Mrs. Bryan, Jan 3, 1877)

This dependence and surety in the providence of God, ensured that Mary would incur the wrath of those who needed to know ‘why’ and ‘how’ things were to be done. But the truth of the path Mary had followed - and expected her followers to walk upon - was a path of absolute folly and trust in God - for that was the way Jesus walked. Had he not said: “consider the lilies of the field, they neither sow nor reap, and yet see how their heavenly father cares for them and clothes them in splendour” (See Matt 6: 25-34)? And had not Jesus also said to knock and ask for all your needs? Mary’s faith was built upon that radicality. The path she embraced - the Path of Mary, was also built upon the same principle. It was a path of absolute detachment from all things - a voluntarily chosen poverty. To be poor was to be blessedly open to the goodness of God. To choose poverty as a voluntary bondage was to choose to be open to receive. It would be difficult and would bring all kinds of trials, but the answer to both would be trust.

There was more to poverty than simply the absence of material things, however. Poverty demanded an attitude to life that was able to rejoice in the smallest pleasure and share with those even less fortunate than yourself. It was a grace that echoed the beatitude, for the truly poor are also those who hope, who share, who celebrate the smallest pleasures of life. This Mary found among the poor - a willingness to share with the other, to cry with the other, and to gift the other with the dog-eared scraps of beauty that poverty brought forth. In the early days of the Little Company and later in her life, Mary would celebrate with joy, the simplicity and the spiritual blessedness of the poor.

How I loved the work (on Mission). I remember a poor woman saying “You are very good sisters to come and help us, you must love Christ, or you are true Christians” or something of that nature, and I remember answering in the same simple strain. “We love all that Christ loves. The poor are His favourites, and we love them because He loves them, though we can never love as He did. We love the sick and the suffering for He loved them.....(AN p.44).

To work among the poor was not a new endeavour for Mary Potter. She had embarked upon it in her days at home in Southsea, she continued it when she began her society, and rejoiced in it. She saw the work among the poor as essential to bringing the truth of the gospel to people who needed its love to raise them from their depressed state. Mary Potter had a gift of being at-one with her people. There was nothing she would not do for them: Mother Cecilia remembers her first day with the new community:

After a good nights rest, I arose, had mass and holy communion then later in the day, Mother, whose zeal knew no bounds, took me round the village, to make the acquaintance of a lot of poor sick people. Mother said: I want to take you out with me to visit the poor sick of the village, and then you will be able to go by yourself another morning. Accordingly I went! Mother took with her food for the poorest, and a big apron which she put on and began our first district nursing. I looked on in amazement. Mother was delicate, but her love of God’s

poor made her strong. First she washed a poor sick mother, gave her some nourishment, then washed the children and gave them their breakfast and sent them to school. then there was the husband's dinner to prepare (generally those men were colliers) She swept the kitchen, and left all ready on the stove for the poor man's dinner. I thought her so lovely in all these actions, but wondered how I would get on when she sent me off to do the same work. (Recollections: MM Cecilia Smith. p.4)

If Mary believed in the necessity of being obedient and humble, she also believed very much in living the reality of her commitment to doing whatever needed to be done to relieve the sufferings of others - no matter what it cost to human pride or respect. Nothing was above her, nothing would not be done assist the 'poor suffering members' of Christ's people. Like her Mother Mary, she would abandon all things to be a mother to those who needed her help:

On one of these rounds with Mother, we had just arrived in a very poor alley, when a woman met us (she was Irish, but had neglected her religion). "For God's sake, Sisters", she said," do go to Mrs. N. she is suffering so much. She is a Protestant, but I am sure she will be glad to see you". We went up one flight of stairs, where we found a woman weeping with a new born baby crying. The woman and her poor room were spotlessly clean, but she said at once what her trouble was, how the baby was to weak to draw milk from her and would surely die from starvation. Neighbours had said "why not get a breast pump", but she said it cost too much, and her husband was only a poor labouring man. I was only 18, and stood listening, but Mother went to work, first rubbing very gently the breasts and then to my astonishment, she bent down and sucked that poor woman's breast till the milk came. The baby was put at once to that fount of life and both mother and child were happy and contented. I looked at Mother in wonderment, but felt I could never do such an act. (op. cit. p.4)

It is easy to sympathise with the reaction of the young Mother Cecilia, but in the mind and heart of Mary Potter, there was the constant theme, that every soul was made in the image and the likeness of Christ, therefore every member of the Little Company had the need to put away all thoughts of human respect - what others might think of them - that souls may be won for Christ. Her own constant question of her Mother - what would Mary have me do ? - led her out of the path of self-determination and into a life of loving liberty of spirit. A liberty of spirit which brought liberation to others, through an apostolate of love.

Mary was not content only with the nursing of the poor sick. Within the people of God, there were always the tasks of feeding the hungry and clothing those who had nothing, this was simply an extension of the work of Christ, and there were tasks of educating the illiterate - not simply to provide an education and a basic human right, but also to enable Mary and her followers teach the good news of Jesus more effectively:

In 1877 and on, we had a night school, for working men and boys, partly to teach them our holy faith, and then, as one poor collier said: "We wants you to learn us Miss, how to read a bit..." Mother was lovely with these poor rough souls, and they loved her and would have laid down their lives for her.

One of these poor men fell ill, and sent for Mother to visit him. She went at once, taking me with her, and some good nourishment which the poor fellow greatly appreciated. Mother washed him, and made him comfortable, but before leaving him, he said: I have a favour to ask you Miss. I've got a sweet heart, and I want to know if

you will write her a love letter from me. At this, dear Mother was somewhat puzzled as she told the good man she had never written love letters, but she would try, if he would just tell her what to say. I sat down and listened to all he had to say, and tried to be serious, at last the end came, and Mother said, “now, wouldn’t you like to sign it yourself? He answered, “Well Miss, if you will do that for me, for as you knows, I can’t write”. Mother said then, “What shall I put?” He answered: “ Yours very truly, W. Bowmer.”

This poor man became a Catholic after. (Memoirs, Mother Cecilia Annals 3)

Along with night schools for the working men, there were schools to be run and organized for the children, meals to be prepared and distributed, and a constant openness to the world in which they lived. It was not without difficulty that the work was done, and not without pain. But a gift of the poor life was, for Mary, a sense of humour and a willingness to embrace all for love. Of her own ability to care for the sick, she writes with a disparaging hand:

I had done very little nursing. The patient was a big woman suffering from delirium tremens, and who could and did use very bad language to the other sisters, but perhaps a plentiful use of holy water kept her from saying anything worse than that I was a “lazy slut”. I kept quiet, saying my prayers, for having a bad arm, I could not work like the other sisters. Indeed, I had to get some women from up the street when she needed moving etc. I could not cut up the beef-tea meat and had to manage the best I could with one arm. I remember washing the doorstep which the other sisters did not. She used to frighten them very much so that they had to call her husband. My only fear was that he would come down without being called, and consequently barred the door with what pieces of furniture the room contained. (A.N. p.25)

If one characteristic emerges from incidents such as these, it is the simplicity of the woman Mary had become. There is no pretension here, no false sense of self or ministry. If there was a task to be done, no matter how simple, or how difficult, there was a way to do it - and if the task demanded a simplicity, a humility that moved beyond human respect, then so be it. In this she reflected the fullness of her own spiritual path. She sought to live out of the warmth and compassion of the heart of her Mother Mary. She, like Mary of Nazareth knew the reality of God -with - us, Emmanuel present in a new way in his people. The role of mother, given her in grace, was a role that brought hope to the hopeless, love to the loveless and care to those who were without care. In performing the tasks needed by the area in which she and her small group of followers found themselves, she nurtured Christ in the world, present among his people, as Mary nurtured the infant Church after the death and resurrection of her Son.

The results of this mission amongst the poor had the desired effect. Mary wrote of the participation of the first members in this manner:

The mission, at the beginning was naturally connected with the convent. Opening on Easter Monday left the young priest who was appointed a very short time to look up strayed Catholics in the place or in the villages near. He mentioned his difficulty, and I said; Well Father, we will send and look them up and do all we can for you.” Upward of twenty made their Easter duty who had been away for years, varying up to forty years. Likewise the converts were so numerous and the attendance at the services so regular and devotional that it could not be doubted that it was a place of special benediction.....

There were about 60 converts, if not more ...in the first year....The sisters had constant Exposition for their benefactors and for the dying...it used to be remarked among them laughingly that they had but to walk the streets to do good - a woman would tap at a window, a child dying unbaptized, or some accident occurring would bring forth some act of charity.”(A.N. p.20)

Such conversions were surely the result of love being incarnated into the harsh reality of life. Mary Potter had been forged in the flames of that love. She had begun a work that was the expression of her deep interior life of union with God, she desired that those who followed her be forged by the same fire, the same love. How was that to be accomplished, and what of the distinct call Mary had experienced to pray for the dying as well as work with them? With foundation came the complexity of formation and the constant need to remain true to the gifts she had been given.

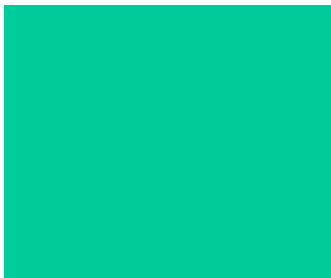
Foundation of the first house of the new society, and seeking out the immediate needs of the area that had to met by the first small band who followed Mary Potter, meant that there emerged a number of tensions.

What Mary believed with all her heart and soul, was that the spirituality she had embraced and which she now wished her followers to embrace, was essential to the mission which she had been given. She had been called to a work - namely to the work of honouring the heart of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, by reflecting in her own life, and in the lives of all those who followed her, the pattern of the Christian life, as exemplified by Mary. She had, further, been called to a an apostolic endeavour - but a solid foundation was necessary if that was to be accomplished.

What Mary Potter saw, in her vision for this new society within the Church, was a group people, who would do what Mary did - embrace the Word of God in their hearts, that they may bring it to birth in their own lives, and then, in the lives of others. Her desire for her followers was that they would be disciples of Jesus, as Mary was disciple. And what she saw and understood, with amazing clarity, was that Mary's discipleship was such that the soul of Mary was lost in the soul of the Son. It had been accomplished through a union that was first of heart and then - and only then, of body. Her followers were called to the same high vocation as Mary. It was available to them, but there were demands attached to this discipleship - a radical dying, a radical moving away from the norms of society, a radical commitment to a 'being in Christ', that the Mother of Jesus had reflected in her own life.

If the congregation was to reflect truly the inspiration given to the foundress, then its spirit and foundation was to be carefully transmitted. The foundations of the spirituality and the graces had to be inculcated in those who would follow, yet at the same time, room had to be left for the grace of God to act. Mary Potter had been the recipient of the action of God's grace as a 'simple unlettered child'. She knew that God acts where he will with a soul, and that whilst there are ways and means of preparing the soul to receive the gifts God wishes to pour abundantly upon it, that there can be no 'hard and fast' rule of thumb in the spiritual life. What she was convinced about, however, was that the spiritual path that the Sisters would follow was Marian....based upon the spirituality of De Montfort. It was from this spirituality, with its emphasis of going to Jesus through Mary, that the reality of "Honour the Heart of My Mother" could be experienced, and that from the following of this "simple" path of radical abandonment, genuine holiness and union with God would arise.

From this path too, would come the understanding of the truth of Jesus, and of the love that had been poured out for us, and for all mankind. To understand just what Mary Potter had in mind for her followers, however, we need to explore more fully, the calls she received, to Honour the Heart of Mary, to live within that Heart; to live as spouse of Jesus crucified and to



honour and offer the Precious Blood in union with Jesus and Mary on Calvary

 [Back](#)

[Go to Section 2](#)