

## Archbishop Karl August von Reisach

“He was born June 6, 1800 at Roth, diocese of Eichstaett: one of the most notable personalities of the German episcopacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: student at the German University in Rome; 1828 ordained priest; 1830 director of the College of Propaganda; 1836, Bishop of Eichstaett; 1847, Archbishop of Munich-Freising. (He was) <sup>1</sup>leader of the German Bishops 1848-1851; 1855, Cardinal in the Curia, and the Pope’s advisor in the German questions.(He) died in 1869 during the preparation for the Vatican Council, to which he had been named First Cardinal-Legate by the Holy Father.” (Pope Pius IX)

### Faithful Friend and Confidante

He had been a faithful friend of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for many years before becoming Archbishop of Munich. Young Josepha Friess (Mother Caroline) through the initiative of her reverend uncle Michael Friess had been sent to learn household skills by serving in his rectory. It was Bishop Reisach who gave her the confirmation name, Eve, because of her curiosity. She later took her religious name to honor him.

As Archbishop of Munich he often officiated at ceremonies, brought notable guests to see the motherhouse, and was a trusted confidant of Mother Theresa. However, as the community continued to grow, he was unwilling to entrust the central government of the order to a woman. He had studied various Rules and found that Rome was unfavorable to this type of leadership on the part of a general superior. “From no longer extant correspondence between Reisach and Father Siegert, we know that by 1843, the bishop (Reisach) had already worked on the constitution for the congregation. Already then, however, he was not in full agreement with the founder. Most of all, he had grave doubts that the institute could ever hope to receive papal approval. On March 8, 1843, he told Mother Theresa through his secretary, ‘We must not expect the church to be in accord with our plans; it is we who must shape our plans according to the mind of the church. Moreover, it would clearly prove that we are not moved by the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>2</sup> He wanted independent diocesan motherhouses under the guidance of Bishops through clergy appointed by the respective bishop and responsible to him. This diocesan control was in direct opposition to the will of Bishop Wittmann and Fr. Job who had steadfastly insisted on a woman as general superior developing a centralized government.

### Control Issues Surface in Confrontation resulting in Interdict

Archbishop Reisach saw Mother Theresa as wanting to withdraw herself from all ecclesiastical jurisdiction in order to “rule as she thought best.”<sup>3</sup>From April, 1852 – June 13, 1854 Archbishop Riesach placed Mother Theresa under “interdict.”

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<sup>1</sup> Reisach as cited in Ziegler, *Mutter Theresia*, 142. (German edition)

<sup>2</sup> Maria Theresia Knippschild, SSND, *Historical Development of the Rule of the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame*, 1994, Ch. 3, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ziegler, op. cit, 186.

The juridical term “interdict” was used to describe the following restrictions placed by Archbishop Reisach on Mother Theresa.

1. She was to organize nothing new nor change anything already in order without his special permission and approval.
2. She could not open any new mission without his seal of approval.
3. She must report the general business of the order to him.
4. She may not negotiate to open further missions without his approval.
5. She must wait for his approval to accept missions outside of his diocese.<sup>4</sup>

Many bishops saw the rapid growth of the congregation as a sign it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. “But others were convinced that Rome would never approve ‘the monarchical form of government in the hands of a woman who appointed her subjects – a power as little befitting the female sex as traveling around the country and visiting. This monarchical form of government the Apostolic Chair had condemned in the Jesuits, and it was not to be expected that the Pope would approve what had been rejected with so much evidence.’”<sup>5</sup>

### **Clue to Tension in Simple Phrase**

In her response to the Archbishop’s questions on April 22, 1852, she consistently responded with humility. She also added a phrase that was not recorded in the Munich Diocesan Minutes, though she and her sisters used it often. When asked if they would submit to the Archbishop’s demands her/their response was: “Yes, I submit to the decree *according to our former observance.*” This cryptic response infuriated the Archbishop. It was another way of saying *we will obey by living the Holy Rule as Bishop Wittmann encouraged us to do, following a woman as general superior.*

If the careful reader is alert to the differences in the two sets of minutes available, there is obvious dishonesty on the part of the clerical secretary. The unnamed School Sister of Notre Dame taking minutes for the sisters noted the following dialogue: the Reverend Vicar asking her to submit and Reverend Mother saying, ‘Yes, I submit, until the Holy See decides otherwise, according to our former observances.’ The SSND secretary notes: “The last phrase was not written down...”

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<sup>4</sup> Ziegler, *Mutter Theresia*, 188-189.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 182.