

## SISTER WILLIBALDA SCHRADER, OSB

July 1, 1879 - June 27, 1962



by Sister Fe Andrea Collantes, OSB

ONE: from A Historian, Sister Caridad Barrion, OSB, 1982

*Time: First Friday, December 1907*

*Place: Entrance of a Church in Colombo*

*Action: A Malayan Woman kissing the hand of a German Sister*

"Reflecting on that incident, Sister Willibalda wrote:

As both hands were firmly united, they reminded me of those Malayans of my future destination in the Philippines. The joining of the two hands in front of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Eucharistic God, was a symbol of a spiritual union with the Malayan race and me, in increasing loving confidence in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

Years later, Sister Caridad Barrion, OSB recorded the following:

"Sister Willibalda was certainly closely knit with the Filipinos, rich and poor, with whom she would eventually be a fellow citizen. In particular, she treasured the young girls in St. Scholastica's College, the school she administered for 31 years and served for 44 years.

Who was this very dearly loved and highly revered "Baday"? She was born on July 1, 1879 in Laer, Westphalia. As a young girl, she attended the Royal Catholic Seminary in Muenster and graduated in 1900. She had to take the "Teacher's Oath" and serve the government as a teacher for five years. She tells of this "Oath" and its significance in her life:

One of the never-forgotten incidents of this time was the pronouncing of my official oath in the presence of my class, first grade, 30 boys and 30 girls, before a crucifix and two burning candles.

His Reverence, the parish priest, was present, too. I had to swear by a solemn declaration, with an appeal to God, never to teach anything against the teaching of the Church and also not against the Regulation of the Government. This oath united me firmly and steadfastly with the Church, with the Government, the people, especially with the parents of my students. For myself, I received the Canonical Mission: to teach Religion.

Before her five-year service was ended, she informed the government of her resignation. She wanted to be a missionary and join an Order dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She entered Tutzing on April 1, 1905. With her was her half-sister, Bernardine, who became a Benedictine Oblate. Sister Willibalda's Profession was on April 14, 1907. She was sent to East Bergholt for further mastery of English. Passing her home in Westphalia on her return trip was most painful for her parents and for her. "Become a good Mission-Sister," were the words of her father before he gave the last blessing. She and Sister Theresia left the Motherhouse on the feast of St. Gertrude, for the Philippines."

"After a typhoon, "SS Rubi" brought them to Manila on Christmas Eve. Looking back to that memorable night, she wrote of her first "joining hands" with the Filipinos:

At 12 o'clock at night, Christmas Night, we attended Holy Mass in an oriental manner. After Mass, full of joy and frolic gaiety the people kissed the Divine Babe. I was much surprised, nevertheless, I liked it. Our trip was one-half the equator; therefore, the Malayan people's customs were different from European ways. It was never hard for me to get used to oriental ways of living, provided there was nothing in them forbidden by our Holy Rule.

As was the way with Sister Willibalda, she recorded her early experience in St. Scholastica's along with her personal reflections. An experienced German teacher, she wrote of her first impression, of her "joining hands" with the Filipino girls whom she came to educate. She was open to learning about them from the start. She wrote:

On January 13, 1908, we started a class of 19 children, different in age and knowledge. Two divisions were made. As it seemed to me, playing and merry-making they loved above all studies. So, we began with what they liked, to lead them to duty and work by and by.

Obedient to the Superior and readily adjusting to circumstances, she profited from every experience; every observation would be for her a "living book." She wrote of her first outing with the pupils which was a learning process for her:

On February 10, we celebrated the feast of St. Scholastica, the Patroness of our school, in a very simple way. Poverty was seen all around. After dinner, Sister Superior said to me: "Go with the children by streetcar to San Juan Heights for a picnic." I had no idea where that place was located, but the children knew it. So, we went as happy and cheerful as could be. When we arrived at San Juan Heights, we left the streetcar and let me say, in no time, all had left the car and were scattered all around in great rejoicing, leaving me alone. Where had they gone? There were some residences of better class people. These had gardens; to them they had hurried to, picking flowers and fruits which they could take. Going to the nearest ones I said: "You may not do that, they are not yours. Joyfully they answered, "Why not, God let them grow for us, too." The owners of those gardens, hearing the noise, came out. When they saw the happiness of the children and mine also, they left

the children to do as they liked it, enjoying the scene which was for me a living book, teaching me the nice relation of children and grown-ups, even to strangers, their hospitality. Later on, I witnessed it more and more by personal observation. Coming home, they narrated in high glee about the beautiful picnic.

Sister Willibalda administered the school from 1908 on, though during the early years of the century, the title “Directress” was not given to her. She was well equipped for her work. One of her early companions wrote that after her arrival systematic work in the school began:

During the vacations, we had to work out our objectives and distribution of subject matter by months. All these and our manuals were sent to the Bureau of Education as Sister Willibalda was accustomed to do in Germany. It seems the Bureau was happy about this and imitated our work somewhat...

Succinctly, Sister Withburga Kilger, another “pillar” of St. Scholastica’s, wrote in the Golden Jubilee Book: “As directress, Sister Willibalda was strict in discipline, gentle, patient and motherly.” As the story of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters would unfold, her role and her characteristics as a religious teacher and administrator would come more and more into focus.”

TWO: From a Chronicler, 1963

#### PREPARATION

"When Theresia and Bernardine from Westfalia arrived at the station in Tutzing on April 1, 1905, they made straight for the convent. As thorny fence surrounded the property of the Sisters, the travellers could not find any entrance gate so they crawled with their luggage through the fence. They found a backdoor that brought them to the coal room. “A queer entrance,” they said, but fearlessly they walked on. Sister Pauline met them and brought them to the parlor. Here they both admired the big reception room with the shining floor, and Theresia burst out, “What a splendid dancing hall!” Soon Mother Birgitta arrived and after a short salutation Theresia again burst out, “Mother Prioress, you have a first-class dancing hall!” Mother Birgitta was silent for a moment. Then she said smiling, “Yes, David also danced before the Ark of the Covenant.” After a short interview both were accepted, Theresia on trial as postulant, Dina as pensionary.

Miss Theresia Schrader, the efficient teacher, who liked dancing and music, had still to learn a lot in the convent. On the evening of that day, she entered, Sister Magistra Ferdinanda came to her cell and asked if she would still wish for something. “Oh, yes, I have in my suit-case, a good apple; may I perhaps eat it still?” Sister Magistra was silent for a moment, then answered, “Better a spiritual communion.”—“I did not know what that was,” Sister Willibalda added when in later years she told us that incident.

Next morning, candidate Theresia, saw how three other candidates were busy removing a pile of rubbish. “What work that is!” Theresia thought, and then she felt Sister Magistra pressed a shovel into her hand. So she prayed in her heart, “Dear Lord! In Holy Scripture it says, ‘If you have faith you can move mountains...’ Help me with this pile of rubbish!” She tried her best to help. Rev. Father Archabbot observing her from the window, remarked to a Sister, “One sees that this one down there has never worked with shovels!”

The first year passed quickly, and on March 25, 1906 Theresia received the Holy habit, and as her patron the Anglo-Saxon Missionary, St. Willibald. A year later, on April 14, she was allowed to sing her first "Suscipe". Sister Willibalda and Sr. Theresia (Bunnenberg), both of whom were destined for the mission in the Philippines, were sent to England for further study of English in St. Mary's Abbey in East Bergholt. After five months, they returned to the Motherhouse. Sister Willibalda was allowed to spend three days at home where Miss Dina was already waiting for her. Another good-bye was before her, but it was a consoling one, at first her father had refused his blessing to his eldest one; now he gave it whole-heartedly.

Theresia and Dina took the boat for the Far East on November 17, 1907, experienced a terrible typhoon in China Sea, they landed in Manila on December 24 where they were welcomed with open arms by the Sisters.

### EDUCATION OF YOUNG WOMEN

"In January 1908, the Benedictine Sisters opened their school in a larger house in San Marcelino Street with Sister Willibalda as directress. For 31 years she stood at this post filled with energy, efficiency and total devotion. She began her work with only 11 pupils. By June it had grown to fifty-one, twenty of whom were interns. Year by year the number of students increased. In 1913 the elementary and secondary courses received Government recognition. The students in their blue and white uniform under St. Willibalda's care were a pleasant sight! The expansion and its high academic requirements were shouldered by the directress. But Sister Willibalda was not only directress, she was also class teacher and prefect of interns, whose number has grown to a hundred.

Sister Willibalda was a true Westfalian, and as such insisted on order and discipline. In spite of strictness the girls felt the love and kindness with which Sister Willibalda embraced them all, big and small. With few exceptions they were obedient and grateful. As a born teacher, Sister Willibalda knew how to keep the attention of the children. She aimed especially at religious education and formation of character. As prefect of the interns she showed a motherly understanding for the problems of the children and wisdom in solving difficult cases. Many of the former students came in later years to their former "Mother", either in Manila or in Baguio, to share with her their joys and sorrows. Some introduced their future husbands. Others brought their little darlings that Sister Willibalda might admire and bless them.

On her 80th birthday, one of her former students who graduated in 1925 expressed her appreciation in an open letter:

*"Who does not remember you dear guide and adviser? Who does not know your unselfish devotion to duty, your affection for us, the wonderful discipline that you inculcated to us? That discipline enables us now to meet difficulties with energy and courage and to conquer them. You guided our steps kindly but firmly, correcting when necessary, praising when we deserved it."*

### WELFARE OF THE POOR: FREE SCHOOL AND CLINIC

In 1939 Sister Willibalda was relieved of her office as directress, and she was entrusted with the care for the poor of the neighborhood and the initiation and training of College students in the work of social action.

Sister Willibalda had a warm heart for the poor. The students who accompanied her on her house visits learned much more from her example than from a theoretical instructions. When in 1941, war broke out, Sister Willibalda still continued her difficult work of charity. In 1946 when St. Scholastica's College rose slowly out of its ruins, she became principal of the newly opened Free School. Here again she put herself completely at the service of the poor, the children as well as their families.

On March 19, 1948 Sister Willibalda had brought poor children for First Holy Communion to the church in Pasay. At a street crossing, a heavy truck bumped her hurting her hip-bone. On a stretcher she was brought to St. Scholastica's College. Her condition looked critical. But after some weeks she recovered and resumed her former work for four more years.

Of her as mother of the poor, Sister Asuncion Bonafe, OSB writes:

*I love to remember Sister Willibalda as a gentle, kind and loving disciplinarian of young boys and girls in the Free School. She was my principal when I was assigned to teach in our Free School for a year. That was my first year in the convent and my first year of my teaching experience. I was a "candidate" then, that's how we were called. What struck me most was her great love and service for the poor. Sister Willibalda was a strict disciplinarian with a purpose: she loves the children and wants them to learn the lessons taught them in school especially the values of obedience and honest work. I remember Aling Puring, a poor woman who helped her clean and do some errands in the school; and also Mrs. Leyva one of the teachers in the school. She treated them all—the teachers, helpers, students and the poor people who come and beg for help—with patience, love and motherly care.*

## SILENT CONTEMPLATION IN BAGUIO

After forty-four years, Sister Willibalda exchanged Manila, the scene of untiring activity, with the quiet convent in Baguio. Eleven years she spent there in the shadows of the pine trees. Her quiet occupations, preparing vegetables, pasting pictures and similar work left her ample time to think of God and pray in the chapel. She lived in intimate union with God, trying to do His holy Will as perfectly as possible.

In spite of hearing loss, she tried to contribute to the recreation something she has specially prepared. At convent feasts it gave her joy to deliver speeches on an edifying topic.

On December 5, 1961 Sister Willibalda unexpectedly had to undergo an operation because of an intestinal obstruction caused by hernia. She received Extreme Unction and in spite of her old age, the operation was a success. But Sister Willibalda never recovered after the operation. She died in her sleep, June 27, 1962."

On our 100th birthday as a Priory we thank God for Sister Willibalda and salute her for starting and passing on the tradition of striving for excellence in study and work, respect and care for the poor, genuine love for our students and learning and active commitment to the poor rooted in:

*unwavering FAITH, enduring HOPE, and active LOVE for GOD.*