

SISTER M. MADELEVA WOLFF, C.S.C.

M. LORETTA PETIT, O.P.

University of Dayton

Sister M. Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., teacher, essayist, poet, and college administrator, through her creative ability and innovative practices made possible major contributions to Catholic education in her lifetime. Without her strong personality and boundless energy, many of her dreams for an ideal college curriculum would not have come to fruition. Her most significant legacy, the Graduate School of Theology, afforded for the first time the opportunity for the laity and religious women to study theology at the graduate level. She served as president of St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, from 1934 to 1961.

FAMILY LIFE

Sister Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., scholar, poet, educator, and administrator dreamed many dreams for an ideal college at St. Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana, then set about fulfilling them with her typical energy and enthusiasm. She surpassed her contemporaries in many ways and initiated educational improvements that became commonplace a decade later. Her vision of a true education for women would empower them to become valiant women in the home as well as competent women in the work place. Her ideals were high, and her tenacity and determination were matched only by her enormous level of energy.

Madeleva was born Mary Evaline on May 24, 1887, to August and Lucy Arntz Wolff in tiny Cumberland, Wisconsin. Baptized there at St. Mary's Church, she joined the family as the first girl and second child. Eva, as she was called, enjoyed as a child the companionship of her older brother Fred and younger brother Vern, short for Werner. Their childhood spent in the northern Wisconsin woods gave them a love of the beauty of the lakes and all of its plant and animal life.

Her father, born a Lutheran, had come to the United States from Germany at the age of 9, without knowing any English. He had little formal education, but like many enterprising men of his time used his native intelligence to learn the language and a trade. He used the newspapers to enrich his life and that of his family. He learned harness-making and succeeded well

in that work in the lumber and milling town of Cumberland. Besides the modest living for his family, August enjoyed the prestige of the citizens of the town as he served as councilman and two terms as mayor.

Eva's mother Lucy, a devout Catholic, was born in America of German immigrant parents. She graduated from high school in Wisconsin, not common for women in the 1880s and 1890s, then taught classes for a short time in a typical country school. She typified many characteristics of German immigrants of this period in her willingness to work hard and to run a strict household. She had none of the amenities of today's homes, laboring with washboard, tub, and hand wringer and a coal stove.

Cumberland was a tiny milling town about 60 miles north and west of Eau Clair, Wisconsin. These were horse and buggy days with no electricity, only gas lights; no central heating, only outdoor toilets; no water system, only cisterns; and no home delivery of mail. Like other small towns, Cumberland had its share of saloons and a general store. The harness shop that August operated was a necessity for all the teams of horses that needed harnesses repaired or new ones purchased.

EARLY EDUCATION

The Wolff children, Fred, Eva, and Vern, received their catechism lessons from the parish priest whenever he was home and at other times from their mother Lucy. Each received First Communion at the usual time. There was no parochial school in Cumberland, so the children attended classes at the local public school. The caliber of the high school can be judged by the courses that Eva enjoyed. She wrote, "Our high school offered two programs, one preparatory for college, the other terminal. As preparation for college we studied four years of Latin, two of German, algebra, plane and solid geometry, English, physical geography, botany, history, constitutional government" (Wolff, 1959, p. 18). Always the smallest and youngest in class, Eva performed well, keeping pace with the best in her class. She graduated from high school in 1904 with only seven others in her graduation class (Wolff, 1959). From her earliest years, she loved to read the books her mother carefully chose for the house and eagerly listened to poetry that her father read to her from his newspaper. Eva "absorbed her parents' complementary and sometimes contradictory qualities: her father's light touch and capacity for play along with humble, childlike charm and sweet gentleness; and her mother's shrewd intelligence, steely determination and profound reserve" (Mandell, 1997, p. 15).

Barely 17 at graduation from high school, Eva remained home for the next year, probably more for financial reasons than age. Fred was attending the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Supporting two students away from

home would strain the family's finances that year. Eva found plenty to do around the house to assist her mother, and at times, her father in his shop. Her leisure hours she spent with her beloved books and in activities with her former high school classmates in Cumberland.

By the fall of 1905, Eva was ready for classes at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. In these early years of the 20th century, it was not a common practice for young women to attend college classes to pursue a degree, but Eva's parents had always valued education and would make sacrifices to finance it. Eva's classes included English, German, French, and her favorite, medieval history, with its culture, guilds, and architecture, a love that lasted a lifetime and influenced her writing, her teaching, and her administration.

For the social life at the university, Eva, Fred, and their friends enjoyed many activities on campus, but as a group often met with the pastor of the local Catholic church for further explanations of their faith. This practice prefigured the activities of the Newman Centers, not yet established. The University of Wisconsin had many attractions for Eva but something was missing. She yearned for more substance in her life.

During the summer after that first year at Madison, Eva noticed with fascination an article in *McClure's Magazine* that told of St. Mary's College at Notre Dame, Indiana. She wrote in her biography, "Something extraordinary had happened....I said to myself 'if this makes a difference in my life I shall always remember it'" (Wolff, 1959, p. 24). She applied for admission and was accepted in September of 1906 as a sophomore. As the carriage brought her up the driveway to the college, Eva saw for the first time a sister of the Holy Cross whose congregation administered the college. Life at St. Mary's would be different. The school still held to practices and rules of a typical French boarding school of the time: uniforms, limited visitors, limited letter writing, and other practices that religious congregations of that day observed. Adjustment to these rules and regulations Eva found difficult.

Eva's sophomore classes included more French and German, logic and Christian doctrine. But it was the sophomore English class that opened her world. There she met Sister Rita Heffernan. This teacher of English was a graduate of Harvard and a published poet. She exemplified the best in a teacher and a writer and here Eva began her lifelong love of poetry and a "manner of writing she had never tried or been taught to use before" (Wolff, 1959, p. 27). She wrote often in these English classes, and her writings regularly appeared in the department's publication. Because of her talents in English, she was asked to teach a class in the academy section of the school, a type of work she had never seriously considered.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

A new way of living and loving now opened up for Eva Wolff. In the fall of 1908, as she was entering her senior year at St. Mary's, she decided to enter the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. They were founded in France in 1841 by Reverend Basil Moreau, a diocesan priest. Their work was to give domestic service to Holy Cross priests and brothers. Four of these sisters came to the United States in 1843 to serve at Notre Dame. But once here, they soon turned to teaching, to nursing, and to establishing their own academies. In 1869, the Indiana province of the Holy Cross sisters became independent of their French beginnings, and St. Mary's at Notre Dame became their central headquarters. Eva's family naturally showed concern about this decision. Her mother did not object, but her Lutheran father was disappointed.

Eva entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross on September 14, 1908. At her formal reception in December that same year, she received the name Madeleva, a combination of Magdalen and Eve. Before her first profession of vows in 1910, Madeleva finished her studies for the Bachelor's degree at St. Mary's in 1909, and continued her writing of poetry and prose.

GRADUATE EDUCATION

Madeleva was chosen to study for her Master's degree at the neighboring University of Notre Dame, while teaching full-time at St. Mary's. She had looked forward to being in the English department at the college with her beloved Sister Rita, but that was not to be. Before Madeleva's profession of vows in 1910, Rita had succumbed to cancer. In 1914, Madeleva pronounced her final vows and 4 years later became head of the English department.

The University of Notre Dame granted Madeleva a Master's degree in English in 1918. During these years of teaching and study, she still found time for her professional writing and for reaching out to contact other poets and writers. In this endeavor, Madeleva was continuing the noteworthy practice of Holy Cross sisters before her who had invited celebrities in the arts and literature to address the faculty and students.

Madeleva's next mission became her happiest (Wolff, 1959). She was sent to be principal and teacher at Sacred Heart Academy in Ogden, Utah. This academy emphasized the arts, especially speech and drama. Her love of the mountains and the beauty of the area inspired her to write more poetry. She enjoyed writing plays for the high school girls and directing their stage production. But these happy years ended when her summer assignment took her to the campus of the University of California at Berkeley, one of the best for graduate classes in English.

Madeleva's summer at Berkeley proved to be successful as she was accepted into advanced courses because of her previous publications. After her entry into the doctoral program that year, the Congregation assigned her to Holy Rosary Academy as principal and teacher of English and French in Woodlands, California. For the next 2 years, Madeleva taught full-time and commuted to the campus at Berkeley several times a week for her doctoral studies. Her writings in prose and poetry won acclaim for her on that campus. For writing the dissertation in her last year of study, Madeleva's superiors advised her to live in San Francisco, closer to the university.

For her dissertation, Madeleva had chosen to interpret the medieval poem "Pearl." She felt as a woman religious, she could interpret it as a study in spiritual dryness in contrast to previous explanations of scholars. With trepidation, Madeleva approached the last hurdles for her degree. With her dissertation, *Pearl: A Study in Spiritual Dryness* (Wolff, 1925), accepted by the university and also for publication, she awaited her 3-hour oral examination. She sat before a full audience because it was so unusual for a woman religious to be in such a position. As expected by her professors, Madeleva acquitted herself well and became, in 1925, the first vowed woman religious to receive a doctoral degree from the University of California at Berkeley.

UNIVERSITY WORK

Yet a larger assignment awaited Madeleva. This time she was asked to start a college, Saint Mary's-of-the-Wasatch, near Salt Lake City, Utah, in September of 1926. As dean of the budding college, Madeleva hoped to build a curriculum and an institution worthy of accreditation. A first-class library became the first priority followed by an enriched program of speakers and lecturers. Though she collaborated with The University of Utah in many aspects of the school program, progress was slow. As usual, Madeleva set a high standard of excellence for herself and for teachers and students. In the fall of 1929, only 31 students enrolled for the college classes (Mandell, 1997). The academy was really supporting the institution.

Madeleva had projected her usual intensity at every assignment, but from the start this project seemed to have no future. The strain of hard work and sleepless nights resulted with bouts of illness in the hospital. Finally in 1933, with the Depression years limiting the enrollment further and with little chance for future growth, Madeleva requested not to return to the Wasatch (Mandell, 1997).

Madeleva's superiors understood the difficulties she had encountered and the need for rest and a change of venue. Accordingly, she received the assignment beginning in the fall of 1933 to spend a year abroad with enrichment courses at Oxford University in England. Her companion for the journey, Sister Verda Clare, C.S.C., hoped to perfect her French in Paris.

This sabbatical year came at a time when Madeleva really needed a change of climate. She had been studying and teaching about the greatest authors and works of English literature and now had the opportunity to visit places dear to her, including Westminster Abbey, the homes of Britain's greatest poets and writers, and the great libraries of London and Oxford. The two sisters sailed from Montreal enjoying the leisure that a journey by sea offered. Madeleva and her companion made many friends on this uneventful but pleasant voyage.

On landing in England, the two visited historic sights in the south of the country, then journeyed to London and its pageantry. They crossed the Channel with sufficient time to view landmarks in Paris before Sister Verda Clare enrolled for her classes. Madeleva returned to England in early October to register as a special student at Oxford University. She enrolled in classes on Milton, the theory and extent of knowledge, Old English, and the classics. One of her tutors was J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* (Mandell, 1997). Some classes consisted of one or two lectures; some met once or twice a week.

Having barely attended classes for a month, Madeleva was called to Paris; Verda Clare had been hospitalized with an emergency appendectomy. With the danger over, doctors advised recuperation in the south of France on the Riviera, where days and nights were far warmer than in Paris. After 2 months of healing, the fall term had come to an end. Classes would not resume for several months, so the two, on their slim budget, decided to see Rome and its sights. There they met a party on pilgrimage to Egypt and the Holy Land. The two sisters were invited as guests to join the group. The gift was in appreciation for the works of the Sisters of the Holy Cross (Wolff, 1959). This unexpected pleasure climaxed their summer.

The time had come to resume study for Trinity term at Oxford and classes in Paris. The highlight of this session for Madeleva was the course with C.S. Lewis on Medieval poetry. This professor did not meet personally with enrollees but furnished a reading list. Communication with the instructor was done chiefly by written messages. Madeleva virtually lived in her beloved library. After the term, Madeleva returned home alone, leaving her companion to continue her studies in Paris.

In August 1934, Madeleva returned to St. Mary's for yet another surprise. The congregation named her the third president of St. Mary's College at Notre Dame. She apparently had no previous knowledge of this assignment. In her biography, she wrote that it was "The one position which our Superior General, Mother Vincentia, had repeatedly assured me would not be assigned to me" (Wolff, 1959, p. 93). In the depth of the Depression, the enrollment was down, and she inherited a million dollar debt on the college.

She had faced challenges before, so again she relied on her “best qualifications...ability to dream and capacity for work” (p. 94).

A complicating factor found in other Catholic women’s colleges, also present at St. Mary’s, had to be addressed. There were no clear lines of demarcation between decisions to be made by the mother superior of the convent and the president of the college. Decisions in the past had been made in the manner of convent life, in a hierarchical fashion, thus giving the president little autonomy. Madeleva was a woman who had ambitions for the college and the young women who attended. To make the institution the best in the country, she had to work for change in the system.

In her early years as president in order to know the students better, Madeleva taught two courses. She wanted those women to be intellectually challenged, spiritually motivated, and socially adjusted. She dreamed of a college second to no other women’s institution in the United States. One strategy for change was the appointment of a curriculum committee to study modern trends. That group included Father William Cunningham from the University of Notre Dame. Going into effect immediately was the separation of upper and lower class offerings. Other changes included student government that gave the young women a voice in most aspects of their campus lives. Madeleva hoped to raise the scholarly aspect of the Bachelor’s degree by inaugurating a comprehensive examination before awarding the degree. Following her predecessor’s practice of bringing to campus good faculty members, the new president set out “finding them, making them and keeping them” (Wolff, 1959, p. 96). Her ideals reflected those she imbibed in her own home – a climate for growth.

During this first year, Madeleva, with her dean of women, Sister Maria Pieta Scot, gradually relaxed the strict, convent-like rules that had applied to students. Together they encouraged activities with the men from Notre Dame in various forms of arts and speech activities (Mandell, 1997). Administrative policies vis-à-vis the superior of the convent were delineated and spelled out. These were unusual departures from previous practice, but ones that Madeleva felt convinced were necessary for growth.

As part of the reform of the curriculum this first year, Madeleva established a 5-year degreed program for nursing students. The degree included all that would equip the graduate for bedside care but also for first-level supervisory positions (Klein, 1983). Another innovation in the curriculum reflected Madeleva’s love for the liberal arts of the Middle Ages. She invited Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, and Mortimer Adler, from the same institution, to meet with the faculty of St. Mary’s to consider a fresh approach to basic studies. As a result, the Trivium became a part of the college program. That program, required of all freshmen, included an integrated

study of literature, composition, and logic. One of its main purposes was to show the relationship between correct thinking and writing. Other colleges adopted St. Mary's program by way of a textbook, *Trivium in College Composition and Reading* (1948), written by a faculty member, Sister Miriam Joseph, C.S.C., that went through five editions (Mandell, 1997).

Closely related in objectives, Madeleva introduced an integrated program for students at the upper level of the college in 1956. The Christian Culture Program, as she named it, presented Western civilization from an interdisciplinary perspective – history, theology, literature, art, and philosophy, with Christianity as the core influence. The course with colloquia and seminars was modeled after a theory of historian Christopher Dawson. It was taught as a bloc embracing a community of thinkers. For such a challenging project, Madeleva used members of her own faculty and some from neighboring Notre Dame. One of the key figures in developing this unusual program was Bruno Schlesinger, a Jewish convert who had done his doctoral work in history at the University of Notre Dame. The program proved to be eminently successful and “became one of the distinctive offerings of the college. It remains the only successful incorporation of Dawson's educational theories in higher education” (Mandell, 1997, p. 175). This effort anticipated team teaching at the college level that became more common in the years ahead.

Foremost in Madeleva's mind when she became president of St. Mary's was a new library to replace the one that consisted of only two rooms. Because the “college had been refused membership in the American Association of Colleges in 1932 for its inadequate library” (Mandell, 1997, p. 163), Madeleva determined to act. She had reveled in the libraries at Berkeley and Oxford and dreamed of a separate building on the campus with room for expansion. Knowing that a new building would only increase the already large debt, Madeleva and her committee initiated the first ever development campaign at St. Mary's. They contacted principally the alumnae for the funds. This effort was questioned by some sisters as well as alumnae as unbecoming of vowed women religious and unlike past practices at St. Mary's. However, the drive resulted in several substantial gifts and plans went forward. Ground was broken in the fall of 1941, the centennial year of the founding of the Holy Cross Sisters in France.

As companion to a well-stocked library, came the goal of stretching the minds and enriching the lives of the students. Madeleva not only continued the practices of past presidents at St. Mary's as they related to bringing prestigious guest speakers to campus, but enlarged the number and collaborated with Notre Dame in mutual sharing of guest artists. Some of these important figures included Seamus McManus, Martin D'Arch, Charles DuBos, Jacques Maritain, and his wife, Raissa. Whenever Madeleva herself traveled

for speaking engagements, she made it a practice to become acquainted with the intellectuals of the area and invited them to speak at her institution. Among the other personages, St. Mary's engaged as commencement speakers Clare Booth Luce and Irene Dunne. More featured speakers came to campus for Madeleva's 10th anniversary as president of the college and also for the centenary year of the founding of St. Mary's congregation in 1944. These contacts gave favorable publicity to the college.

As early as 1941, Madeleva realized her student body needed integration with other cultures present in the American population. To integrate the campus in that year, without consulting others, she admitted the first Black student to the college. It was a courageous move, one with repercussions from some in her own congregation and from alumnae. Madeleva wrote, "Southern parents wrote enraged letters telling me that as a northerner I did not know what I was doing" (Wolff, 1959, p. 98). In her decision, she received the support of most clergymen and never regretted her decision, which at that time was well ahead of most residential women's colleges. "That first student, Carmelita Desobrey, a beautiful Creole girl, came to Saint Mary's in September. By the third semester she led the school academically" (p. 99). Others soon followed as did students from other countries. "Late in Madeleva's administration, foreign students at the college represented thirty-eight different nations" (Mandell, 1997, p. 172).

In 1952, after 18 years of dreaming for a fine arts building for the campus, plans moved forward. Sister Francis Jerome, former vice-president under Madeleva made this possible. At her death in 1948, Francis Jerome's will specified that her family inheritance of almost a half-million dollars be used to construct a fine arts building. After a few years of delays for various reasons, the first shovel of earth for the foundation was removed in February 1955. The building would be named in honor of Basil Moreau, founder of the Holy Cross Order. This date coincided with the 100th anniversary of the charter for the college. Upon completion of the structure, the theater received the name O'Laughlin Auditorium to honor the family name of Sister Francis Jerome. "Helen Hayes, First Lady of the American Theater, was the first person to address an audience from the magnificent stage" (Wolff, 1959, p. 104). With the first graduating class from this venue, honorary degrees were conferred for the first time to outstanding persons. Those so honored included Walter Kerr, the commencement speaker, and Maria Augusta Trapp. National publicity came to O'Laughlin Hall on the occasion of the premier performance of the NBC Opera Company in 1956. This world premiere was just the first in a series of cultural programs that brought major speakers and entertainers to this small Midwestern college under the leadership of a most unusual woman religious.

TEACHER EDUCATION

Another undertaking dear to Madeleva's heart was the education of teachers for the parochial schools. Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, young professed sisters went into the Catholic schools with a minimum of education beyond high school. It was financially impossible for religious congregations to finance the costs of preservice education for the young religious who were in great demand by pastors to staff their schools. Most of the young religious engaged in a piecemeal program of preparation (i.e., summer school sessions, and where available evening and Saturday classes during the academic year). Less attention was paid to teacher preparation than to opening an elementary school. The overriding sentiment seemed to be that faith must be preserved at all costs.

In her concern for the preparation of teachers, Madeleva joined a group of colleagues in the College Committee of the National Catholic Educational Association's annual meeting in the mid-1940s. They petitioned for a session on teacher preparation. At the meeting of the association in San Francisco in 1948, Madeleva "asked for the last time that such a section be authorized and put to work" (Wolff, 1959, p. 112). As usual, the chairmanship of the committee fell to the petitioner. Members of her committee were outstanding representatives from their various congregations. Each wrote a proposal for an ideal but practical plan to solve the problems of teacher preparation before entering the classroom. The title of Madeleva's paper was "The Education of Sister Lucy." The program called for the best in a spiritual, cultural, and intellectual education for young religious. The success of the session in Philadelphia in 1949 was overwhelming despite being scheduled on the last day of the conference in a room much too small for that vital issue. The plan for preservice education capsulated in Madeleva's paper, later published as a book (Wolff, 1949), proved to be a key factor in the ensuing Sister Formation movement that evolved from that meeting. In the summer of 1956, the Ford Foundation gave a grant to outstanding women religious educators to plan a curriculum for preservice sisters, giving them a liberal education based on theology and philosophy. The first Sister Formation Program in St. Louis began in 1964.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The formation of the Graduate School of Theology at St. Mary's became the crowning achievement in Madeleva's term as president. She had been critical of the lack of preparation in theology for teachers and often of the caliber of classes taught.

The courses in religion that were offered in our colleges were the dullest and the most poorly taught in the curriculum. We had no graduate schools in which to prepare young teachers of Theology on levels equal to their preparation in profane subjects. (Wolff, 1959, p. 114)

She claimed religion to be “the last and least interesting of all subjects taught” (p. 115). There were no institutions in the United States where women religious and lay students could study theology at the graduate level. Again a committee of the National Catholic Educational Association addressed the issue. Investigation of possibilities and solutions fell to Madeleva. Encouraged by Bishop Edwin O’Hara to begin the school at St. Mary’s, she started small in 1943 with a 6-week course in a summer session, having no tuition and offering no credit. The first group studied Scripture and theology with three well-qualified priests. Then with the help of Father Michael Gruenthaner, S.J., Madeleva obtained the necessary faculty, curriculum, and library acquisitions for a full-fledged graduate program. Approval from the pope followed, and priests from Holy Cross, Jesuit, Precious Blood, and Dominican provinces taught throughout Madeleva’s presidency. She had provided the first opportunity for lay people and women religious to study theology at the graduate level. Candidates for the program came from the states and from abroad. Two years after the introduction of the Graduate School of Theology, Madeleva initiated an undergraduate program in theology at St. Mary’s, the first women’s college to offer an undergraduate major in theology (Mandell, 1997).

CONCLUSION

Madeleva demonstrated outstanding leadership in Catholic higher education during her tenure as president at St. Mary’s from 1934 to 1961. She encouraged both faculty and students to make the most of their lives and their stewardship. She urged her faculty members to participate in professional organizations, to attend educational meetings, to submit papers, to engage in research, and to publish wherever possible. She brought the college from a good all-women’s school to an outstanding institution known and respected here and abroad.

Throughout the years of administrative initiatives, Madeleva found time to speak, to write, and to publish. Madeleva recalled in her autobiography of speaking to faculty and students of the graduate department at Berkeley (Wolff, 1959) and to the graduate English faculty at Columbia University on “frontiers of poetry” (p. 145). She cites “innumerable lectures, papers and the like before conventions, confraternities, Conferences of Christians and Jews” (p. 145). She addressed a Mormon group at the

bishop's house in Salt Lake City and other non-Catholic groups on meditation and contemplation. Poetry was second nature to her. Madeleva reminisced that she had published 10 books of verse most of which appeared in a single volume called *Selected Poems* (Wolff, 1939). "I wrote at least one poem a month over a period of fifteen or twenty years, everyone of which I sent out at once to earn its living by publication in some magazine" (Wolff, 1959, p. 147). The busy administrator and teacher may wonder how Madeleva found time for all this productivity. She claimed religious silence as one opportunity to think and write. Others came from her many bouts of insomnia and chronic bronchitis that sent her to the convent infirmary or the hospital. Her recuperation times were profitably spent resting and planning.

In her lifetime, Madeleva received many awards. Theta Pi Alpha of Pittsburgh in 1948 awarded her the Siena Medal in recognition as a "Catholic woman who has made a distinctive contribution to Catholic life in the United States" (Mandell, 1997, p. 216). In 1950, she received the Woman of Achievement Award from the Women's International Institute to be presented in the same year Eleanor Roosevelt received it (Mandell, 1997).

In 1953, Madeleva was especially pleased to accept an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree, presented by Father Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., the new president of the University of Notre Dame. The award described Madeleva as "a Catholic educational leader, a poet, a founder of the first graduate school of theology for lay persons and women religious orders and a patron of Christian Culture" (Mandell, 1997, p. 216).

In the late 1950s, at the request of Macmillan Publishing, Madeleva wrote her autobiography called *My First Seventy Years* (Wolff, 1959). It sold well both in hard cover and paperback. Written over a period of 2 weeks while recuperating from an illness, she considered it only a beginning. She hoped to write a sequel at some future date.

During the last years of her presidency, Madeleva gave evidence that age was taking its toll. Her pace remained steady, but more time was consumed with insomnia and recuperation from exhaustion and depression. Her mother Lucy died in 1948 and her father August in 1954. Her emphasis at St. Mary's then turned to beautification of the campus.

In celebration of her 25 years as president of St. Mary's, Madeleva again visited Europe in the summer of 1959, but the old enthusiasm was noticeably lacking. She did visit many friends but her notes were sketchy, and illness caused cancellation of other appointments. Even at the celebration of 50 years as a religious, her brother Vern noticed the deterioration of her physical condition. He knew it was not in her personality to retire.

Temperamentally, it would have been impossible for Madeleva to

resign from any assignment much less the presidency of St. Mary's. She remained proud of her accomplishments but also realized how precarious her health was. Though the circumstances of her retirement have never been made public, apparently some alternative was found, and Madeleva resigned in 1961.

As past president of St. Mary's, Madeleva occupied a suite of rooms at the college – a pleasing arrangement of space for herself and guests. She served as consultant to the new president and received many friends and speakers at the college. For 3 years, she enjoyed all the activities of the campus without the onus of responsibility.

Through the last few years of her life, Madeleva had consulted a physician in Boston about her health problems. In July 1964, she returned there when she suffered an attack of severe pain and was hospitalized. The doctors decided that she needed surgery to remove her gall bladder. That procedure appeared to be successful but on the morning of July 25, Madeleva died suddenly. The only explanation the physician gave was “a rare fulminating and overwhelming infection in the blood stream which occurred in spite of the large doses of antibiotics she was receiving” (Mandell, 1997, p. 256). Her death shocked a world of admirers, but her contributions to Catholic education, her essays, her poetry, and her total dedication to the life of the mind will keep her memory alive for years to come.

An excerpt from Madeleva's *Gates and Other Poems* seems appropriate to close her story. In her bold innovations she relied on a higher power and remained steadfast to the end.

Fare infinitely well,
 You who have valorously dared
 This last, unshared
 Unending and all-perfect quest;
 You who at length can tell
 The things God has prepared
 Are best,
 Are best. (Wolff, 1938, p. 34)

REFERENCES

- Joseph, M. (1948). *Trivium in college composition and reading*. South Bend, IN: McClave.
- Klein, M. E. (1983). *Sister M. Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C., St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana: A study of presidential leadership*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.
- Mandell, G. P. (1997). *Madeleva*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Wolff, M. M. (1925). *Pearl: A study in spiritual dryness*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Wolff, M. M. (1938). *Gates and other poems*. New York: Macmillan.
- Wolff, M. M. (1939). *Selected poems*. New York: Macmillan.

Wolff, M. M. (1949). *The education of Sister Lucy: A symposium on teacher education and teacher training*. Holy Cross, IN: Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame.

Wolff, M. M. (1959). *My first seventy years*. New York: Macmillan.

Sister M. Loretta Petit, O.P., is a professor emerita of the University of Dayton and a writer and lecturer on the history of the Dominican Order in the United States. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Sister M. Loretta Petit, O.P., 1230 West Market Street, Akron, OH 44313.