



## **Bl. Alix le Clerc**

**Born:** 2 February 1576 Remiremont, Duchy of Lorraine, Holy Roman Empire

**Died:** 9 January 1622 (aged 45) Nancy, Duchy of Lorraine, Holy Roman Empire

**Venerated:** in Catholic Church (Canonesses of St. Augustine of the Congregation of Our Lady)

**Beatified:** 4 May 1947, Vatican City, by Pope Pius XII

**Major shrine:** Cathedral of Our Lady, Nancy, Meurthe-et-Moselle, France

**Feast:** 9 January

Alix Le Clerc (2 February 1576 – 9 January 1622), known as Mother Alix, was the foundress of the Canonesses of St. Augustine of the Congregation of Our Lady (French: Notre-Dame), a religious order founded to provide education to girls, especially those living in poverty. They opened Schools of Our Lady throughout Europe. Offshoots of this Order brought its mission and spirit around the globe. She was beatified by the Catholic Church in 1947.

### **Life**

#### **Early life**

Alix (the local form of Alice) le Clerc was born into a wealthy family in Remiremont in the independent Duchy of Lorraine, part of the Holy Roman Empire. She was a vivacious, lively girl, who loved music and dancing. She would spend her evenings partying with her young friends. When she was about 18, her family moved to Mattaincourt, a manufacturing center. Three years later, a sudden illness confined her to her bed. While there her only reading material was a devotional book. This book would change her life.

#### **Conversion**

From the reading and reflection she was able to do while recuperating from her illness, Le Clerc began to feel the need for a dramatic change in her life. She approached the pastor of the town, Dom Peter Fourier, C.R.S.A., with whom she shared this growing conviction about the need for a new direction in her life, but that none of the religious Orders appealed to her. This left her doubtful about the validity of her struggle.

A vision of Our Lady answered her questioning and gave her the direction she sought, as she felt called to care for the daughters of the poor of the region, who had little or no access to education. Supported in this by Fourier, who himself had seen the desperate need for this among the rural populace of his parish, she resolved to commit her life to this goal. She was joined in this enterprise by four of her friends, with whom she established a community where they could follow lives of simplicity, prayer and respecting the presence of God in each girl whom they would receive for instruction.

## **Foundress**

On Christmas Day 1597, Le Clerc and her companions made private vows in the parish church to Fourier. The small community opened their first school the following July in Poussay, where they offered free education to the girls of the duchy. Expansion of their work developed quickly, with communities being opened in Mattaincourt (1599), Saint-Mihiel (1602), Nancy (1603), Pont-à-Mousson (1604), Verdun and Saint-Nicolas-de-Port (1605). All the schools took the name of Notre-Dame.

Le Clerc established herself in Nancy, capital of the duchy, and devoted herself to the care of the girls who came to the schools of the new congregation. At the same time, working through major obstacles, she and Fourier developed Constitutions for the new congregation through which the communities could be legally recognized by the Church and the State.

The vision Le Clerc and Fourier had was one in which schools would give a free education to all, poor and rich, and all girls would be welcome, regardless whether they were Catholic or Protestant. Additionally, the other needs of their locales would be answered, with visits to the sick and poor. They encountered resistance to this open form of life from the hierarchy, who did not look favorably on their teaching outside a cloister. In consultation with the first Sisters, especially Le Clerc, the final form of the Constitutions which Fourier wrote took an innovative answer to this by allowing two ways of life to those women who wished to follow the goals of the congregation. In keeping with ancient practice, each community would be autonomous, subject to the local bishop, and would each have to seek this formal recognition on its own from the local religious authorities. The houses were to be of two forms, all following the Rule of St. Augustine, as well as the Constitutions:

- Those monasteries whose members would take public vows (canonesses) and would observe full monastic enclosure, wearing the habit of the congregation.
- Those monasteries whose members would take private vows (Daughters/Sisters (French: Filles) of the congregation) and would be free to leave the monastery with the approval of the Superiors of the house for any legitimate purpose, such as going to Confession, participating in Mass when unable to do so in the monastery, or participating in works of charity. They would not wear the religious habit of the Congregation, but instead one developed for that community.

The first approval for the Constitutions came on 6 March 1617 from the Bishop of Toul,

in whose territory Nancy then lay, as a result of which that became the first monastery of the congregation. Le Clerc and the members of that community professed public vows on 2 December 1618, at which time she took the religious name of Teresa of Jesus, after the great Carmelite foundress. Immediately following the ceremony, Fourier met with the assembled Superiors of the various houses and distributed copies of the approved Constitutions for their study and observance. Shortly after that, the canonesses of Nancy held their first formal elections and Le Clerc was elected the prioress of the community.

Le Clerc oversaw the development of the congregation as the various houses, each in their own turn, became formally recognized. For the rest of her life she led the development of the spiritual and practical aspects of the lives of the canonesses in the various monasteries. She would visit each new community, to instill in them the spirit of their founding, saying to them, *Que Dieu soit votre amour entier!* (May God be your only love!), reflecting the deep spiritual life she maintained in the midst of her responsibilities in the congregation.

### **Death and veneration**

Le Clerc died on 9 January 1622 at the monastery in Nancy. She was buried in the cemetery of the monastery in a lead coffin.

The cause for her canonization was begun in the latter part of the century, but proceeded slowly. The monastery in Nancy was destroyed during the upheavals of the French Revolution, and the traces of the grave were lost. With the re-establishment of Catholic institutions in France in the early 19th-century, the cause was taken up again, but faced the difficulty of there being no remains, normally required during the process. Various efforts were made by a number of priests to find Le Clerc's remains in the precincts of the former cloister of the monastery over the next century, without success.

Despite this obstacle, the Holy See decided to proceed with the beatification of Mother Teresa of Jesus. This was done by Pope Pius XII on 4 May 1947.

### **Finding her remains**

Not long after this declaration of her holiness by the Catholic Church, in 1950 a group of young students in Nancy was exploring the basement of a building in the city and found a lead coffin buried nearly 5 feet (1.5 meters) below the ground.

By 1960 the remains were conclusively identified as those of the Blessed Alix and were placed for veneration in the chapel of the Notre Dame School of the city. A special chapel was eventually built for the remains in the cathedral and they were transferred there on 14 October 2007, where they are available for veneration by the public.