

## Empress Maria Theresa and the Female Aspect of Dominion

Barbara Grabner  
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*Barbara Grabner giving her presentation in Bratislava, which WFWP in Slovakia had organized*

For a long time I have wanted to do something to help people understand why the "Age of Women" has come and what that has to do with True Mother's mission. Yet, would it be possible to help people understand who do not understand the nature of the Trinity as explained by the Divine Principle? How was I to transport our knowledge about the providence of the Woman-Messiah to the public? Where could I find facts based on common sense and beyond theological dispute?

Late in January, I got the tool to make my intentions reality. This year marks three hundred years since the birth of one of the most formidable female rulers in European history.

Maria Theresa was born on May 13, 1717, in Vienna. She inherited from her father, Charles VI, the huge Hapsburg Empire, which included what is today Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belgium, parts of Italy and other territories. Furthermore, during the early days of our church in Austria, some members had dreams of Maria Theresa that showed them she was supporting the Second Coming. Her popularity among members is high; some sisters even consider her a patron of WFWP. In light of that, I offered to give a lecture about this remarkable woman.

### **Bratislava, feminine government**

During April, I gave my presentation in several towns including Vienna, and members and guests alike were inspired. We had advertised the events in local newspapers to attract new guests. Yet, I gave my very first presentation, titled "Maria Theresa: The Female Aspect of Dominion," not in Austria but in Bratislava. The Slovak chapter of WFWP organized it. Because the crowning of Maria Theresa as Queen of Hungary occurred in Bratislava in June 1741, many inhabitants responded to the announcement of the lecture with strong interest. Thanks to an advertisement by the Austrian Embassy, far more people than expected came.

More than fifty guests found a place to sit or stand in the lecture hall; others did not get over the threshold. The presentation highlighted her character and childhood, marriage and motherhood, her reforms, her establishment of what today are famous institutions and her brave defense of the Hapsburg Empire against invasions by neighboring kings.

Among the audience was a respected history professor who is presently writing a book about Maria Theresa. He contributed some comments on her activities on Slovak territory. Two radio journalists recorded the entire lecture. Another famous journalist interviewed the professor and me right after the lecture; Slovak Radio broadcast the interview on a Sunday afternoon. A few days later, the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Women in the City* interviewed me at length. During the interview, she commented that even today, few women enter politics. To which I replied, "Women still have to clarify how to work in politics, what female aspect they can bring to politics. I do not think it's good if they break their family and put their career first. Being a mother means acquiring the natural ability to lead and do it in a different

style by introducing into politics the intuitive and maternal feeling that women have, even if they do not have children.

Maria Theresa is certainly a model. She was a sovereign and mother, and she always said that you cannot rule unless you love people. That could be the feminine aspect of governing.



### **Budapest, charisma and charm**

Based on the lecture in Bratislava, the Austrian Embassy in Hungary invited me to give one in Budapest. This took place at the end of April in the famous Andrassy University. I felt that Heaven had arranged that to happen. Earlier I had wanted to hold a lecture for WFWP Hungary, but we had yet to reach an agreement. The audience filled the Andrassy University library to its capacity; even the Austrian cultural attaché and the ambassador attended. A Hungarian radio station interviewed me. The response of the university audience was overwhelming and there was a lively question-and-answer session at the conclusion.

You have to understand that Maria Theresa cherished the support of the Hungarian nation throughout her life. When in October of 1740 her father, Charles VI died, his daughter aged twenty-three, immediately faced resistance to her

succession from European powers. They wanted to divide parts of the empire among themselves. Everyone was convinced that this young and politically inexperienced woman would not last long on the throne. Fortunately, the Hungarian aristocracy supported Maria Theresa when she was in the gravest danger. Of charming personality and of engaging naturalness, she won the hearts of the ultra-masculine Hungarian nobility at their first meeting.

### **A kind-hearted ruler**

During her forty years of rule, she reformed the empire from branch to root and demonstrated the skills of a gifted diplomat and military strategist, although she led only defensive military engagements.



Maria Theresa was courageous, generous and kind. She arranged events for women to experience things that had hitherto been for men only. Once, after a military victory, she invited women to a "Ladies Carousel" (a carousel was a tournament for knights on horseback) in her castle. There, the aristocrat ladies rode on horseback (though some rode in carriages drawn by horses) and yielding swords, they stabbed puppets impaled on poles, just as male knights traditionally did.



## Regarding the arts

Her great love for opera and the theatre is worthy of mention; she was a gifted singer and performed onstage as did most of her children. Her court attracted many famous musicians, helping make Vienna a capital of music. The famous composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart played violin in front of the empress and her family at the age of seven. After his performance, he jumped on the empress' lap and hugged and kissed her heartily. One historian called her "the most human of the Hapsburgs."

In the later part of her rule, she focused more on human concerns, such as abolishing torture. In 1774, she established compulsory school attendance for all children. From then on, millions of children, the offspring of rich and poor alike, had to attend six years of school to gain a basic education, which the state paid for. To provide a quality education, she established academies to train qualified teachers. She wanted to raise the level of knowledge in every social sphere. From her time on, neither being in the upper class nor of noble descent were preconditions to having a career in the state administration or the military.



## Her example of faith

Important, too, is her devotion to God; she attended one or two Catholic masses daily in church and ordered her children to pray daily and study religious literature. Sadly, her youngest daughter, who became the French queen Maria Antoinette, had a completely different character and did not heed her mother's advice. If she had taken after her mother, the French Revolution would not have happened or at least not with such ferocity.

## As mother to her adult son

Her complicated relationship with her oldest son and co-regent, Joseph II, is a special story. Since their characters and worldviews differed, they quarreled constantly, mainly about the details and methods of reforms and about government issues. Her son tended to make decisions and implement reforms hastily, which backfired. Nevertheless, they stayed together until the last hour of her earthly life came in November 1780.

Many historians have called Maria Theresa "Savior of the Hapsburg Dynasty." When she ascended to the throne in 1740, the empire was on the brink of dismemberment. During her forty years of rule, she transformed the problem-ridden conglomerate of lands into a united and prosperous centralized state. Thanks to the marriages of her numerous children and grandchildren with spouses from other dynastic families, she has also been called "Europe's mother-in-law."

## An exemplary woman

During the Middle Ages, perhaps fifty European queens made history; just to mention a few: The Spanish queen Isabella I, the English queens Elisabeth I and Victoria, Katharina the Great and Elisabeth I in Russia. Unlike Queen Victoria, Maria Teresa was the ruler. She listened to her husband and advisers (whom she picked personally and carefully) but always made the final decision herself.

Therefore, she is considered an enlightened absolute monarch. Additionally, thirty queens ruled on behalf of an absent or dead husband-king or an infant-son, the future heir. Quite a few of these eighty women later became the subject of a play or a movie. However, Maria Theresa outshines them all: She was not only a talented and successful sovereign but an equally devoted wife and mother of sixteen children. Other female rulers either never married, or had loveless or childless marriages or had children whom they did not care much for. Maria Teresa took all three roles -- ruler, wife and mother -- seriously. For having mastered all three roles, she won admiration even from feminist circles today.

Maria Theresa knew her husband Francis from early childhood, because he served her father at the imperial court. They not only appreciated each other but felt deep, mutual love. The marriage was considered a happy one, although Francis was said to have had numerous affairs. When Francis died after twenty-nine years of marriage, Maria Theresa wrote, "I lost a husband, a friend, the only object of my love."

## Erasing prejudice

Maria Theresa, who ruled and modernized the Hapsburg Empire, as no other ruler before or after her has done, elicited praise even from her enemies. Frederick II, King of Prussia, who had invaded her territories and forced long years of war upon her, said after receiving the news about her death, "She gave credit to her throne and her gender; though I led war against her, I never considered her to be my enemy."

In light of the violence, intrigues and hostile alliances instigated by this Prussia king, this is truly an amazing statement! On another occasions he lauded her with the words, "Finally there is a virile ruler on Habsburg's throne, but alas it is a woman."

Society had considered women inferior to men in many respects. Maria Theresa contributed much to destroying that prejudice.

