
EMPOWERING BRILLIANT MINDS FOUNDATION, INC. (EBM) pursues its commitment to serve the public elementary schools through its various programs implemented since its establishment in 2011. These programs allow EBM to reach out to thousands of students by providing them with classrooms, educational materials, training of teachers as well as nutritious food and health care through its feeding program and medical-dental services respectively.

EBM firmly believes that a teacher with a vocation is the life of the school, and the inspiration behind the teaching strategy or method. In our search for a model teacher of such caliber, we zeroed in on Victoria Diez y Bustos de Molina, a public school teacher of the 19th century, who gave her life in martyrdom to defend her faith in God. Beatified by St. John Paul II in 1998, Blessed Victoria Diez continues to be relevant for our times. As we go through the pages of her life in ‘The Teacher from Hornachuelos’, may the teacher in us unfold so that we may give a flavor of love and joy and be able to touch many more lives.

Rosalinda Y. Basas
Executive Director
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Ma. Dolores Gómez Molleda was born in Madrid on September 15, 1922 and died on October 10, 2017 in Salamanca.

She obtained her Licensure in Philosophy & Letters, with specialization in Geography and History from the Complutense University of Madrid with flying colors. She likewise obtained her Professorial Chair in contemporary History from the University of Santiago de Compostela and from the University of Salamanca,

where she was then Rector.

A hardworking author of countless books, she was also busy doing researches in history, writing articles in magazines and giving talks in national and international Congresses.

As a dedicated researcher on the Works of St. Pedro Poveda, she devoted the last years of her life in the conceptualization and elaboration of the Critical Edition of his writings. She had the delight of seeing through the editing of various volumes and left a legacy of the complete edition of the rest of the volumes.

Since the beatification of Victoria Diez on October 10, 1993, a special relationship has been developed between her and 'Vitorita' as she fondly called Victoria.

Her huge admiration for Victoria was such that before her death in 2017, she had the booklet 'On the Front Row' reprinted, with the desire that all teachers may understand the 'great message' that this life embodies.

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***This booklet is for you--
yes, you who plan to teach and
live in a small,
remote town.***

What could someone living in a small town possibly do? Here, life is so dull; everyday is an exact copy of the other. It is as if one cannot do anything good for the people. They have almost no resources at all. And then, we have to face it—the ingratitude. Yes, only with God’s love will it be possible. What can one do with this people? BE AN APOSTLE. For this, neither gratitude, nor money, nor health, nor exceptional qualities, nor intelligence is necessary. It is enough that the apostle accepts to be just that: SOMEONE SENT. This requires that an apostle be someone completely taken by God: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all peoples... teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.” (Mt 28: 19-20). This was what Victoria Diez y Bustos de Molina, the teacher from Hornachuelos did. She gave her life for Christ.

AT THE FOREFRONT

The focal point of this story began one morning, when Victoria knelt in the Hornachuelos Church, and face to face with Christ, made this agreement:

Ask me a price. Anything... in exchange for the salvation of this town and its people.

I know a priest who, when giving advice on making decisions that are big and difficult, always adds:

Even if in fear your veins and blood would freeze.

Victoria made this agreement with a lot of fear, but with an enormous and generous decision: “When I think that these souls are ready for God, (who knows if also for me who am nothing) and wish their salvation, I find myself renewed with fortitude that only grace can give.

And then in the streets. A day just like everyday, greeting everyone with smiles. A quick breakfast with her mother; a glance at the newspaper with the last mouthful and rapidly off to school. With the face clean and the fire lighted even before Mass so that the mother, between tasks, could cast a glance at the kitchen, until she returns from school.

A DIFFICULT FIELD

Even at a young age and with poor health but with a will to fulfill one's duty with much love for God, one can transform the world. Even if one has no influence, nor money nor privileged social position, even if the people are like what Victoria had to deal with: "apathetic or indifferent to the things of God," even if the Church is always empty and the Tabernacle has not been opened for entire months to distribute Holy Communion, because nobody asks for it. Even if the men with grim faces simply watch from the plaza as the teacher and the school children enter the Church to attend Mass on Sundays. Even if the students have not heard about God nor about the Blessed Virgin. Even if the Government obliges the people to take out the crucifixes from the classrooms and prohibits the study of Catechism, even if dangerous and immoral books are encouraged for reading.

These were happening when Victoria was teaching in Hornachuelos, but none became an obstacle for her to fulfill her mission as Catholic teacher. On the contrary, for a true apostle, a field as difficult as this is something good. "I have always asked Our Lord to take me to a place little known and loved, and at last, after much waiting, I received from heaven what I had so many times asked for.

THIS TOWN IS NOT BAD AT ALL

“This town is apathetic and indifferent, but it is not bad at all. These girls never had anyone who would attend to their formation, nor anyone who would guide them,” Victoria often said to herself courageously day after day. “These poor children of mine are not accustomed to be spoken to with love. Anything you say to them, as long as it is accompanied with love, falls on their souls and bears fruit.”

NOT JUST ANYTHING

For Victoria, teaching is not just anything. The teacher is in the school much longer than what is required. She explains the lessons in such a way that it is a pleasure listening to her. She knows the situation of every student. She lives for everyone. She talks with the parents. She visits their homes. She has opened a school library. At night, in special sessions, she teaches the town folks how to read and write. She does the same on Sundays for the girls between fifteen and twenty years of age because according to her, they need it more than they need bread.

The academic exhibits that Victoria organizes every now and then—something unheard of until then—clearly show the fruits that the students have reaped. This is very beneficial because it draws smiles from the early skeptics, especially seeing the enthusiasm of the new teacher.

SNACKS AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK

The school in Hornachuelos, as one enters, has a small office with one table, one bookshelf, and two chairs, and the statue of the Virgin on the wall; and this is all. The classroom is the field of work for Victoria. This little office is her place of authority. Here she speaks with the parents of the students. Here she gives counsels, plans, prepares her classes. And here, every morning, as everyone knows, is a place of refuge for students with poor health: the one who has a gloomy face is treated like a queen and given the scrambled egg that Victoria's mother punctually sends to her daughter because she is frail and has sore throat.

TAKING TURNS AT THE HEATER

Hornachuelos is cold in winter. Everyday a small charcoal heater arrives from Victoria's mother for the teacher who is freezing and who has exchanged the comfortable flat of Seville for this remote school. Everyday, the students take turns to enjoy the warmth of the heater. Victoria has excluded herself from such comfort.

As much as possible, (the salary of a teacher hardly suffices) the girls have shoes and winter clothes and medicines for a sick mother. When there is no money, there is a discreet little paper, a letter of recommendation for

a father who is out of work. At noon, there is a “casual” meeting of the teacher with the students so that they may be accompanied to Victoria’s home and eventually be invited to eat. According to her, some students live very far away from school. Of course Victoria’s mother knew all this by memory and she would always prepare a meal for three.

A WINTER COAT WAS LOST

Every time Victoria would go to Seville, she would buy with her savings a good piece of cloth for the school. In this way, the girls learn to sew, making their own clothes that they badly need. On her part, Victoria’s mother took pains in keeping the clothes of the house and of locking the clothes trunks well because everything has a strange way of disappearing, to their delight. Well then, let them get lost because afterwards, Mama Victoria recognizes them in the streets as her daughter’s warm and cozy winter coat that one day disappeared from the hanger without knowing how and when.

THE VIRGIN OF PARDONS

The school had been granted a new and bigger place. It took a good round of walks and visits for the teacher to accomplish this feat. The classrooms now have big windows, maps, beautiful pictures. And on the wall, a small Virgin of Pardons. Let me explain.

The corrective measures resorted to by the new

teacher have torn down the rock-hard walls. “On the table, I have a beautiful image of the Blessed Virgin with the Baby Jesus. The girls like it very much and I call her the **VIRGIN OF PARDONS**. Every girl who hits another or says a bad word must ask pardon from the Blessed Virgin. The girls are impressed to see that I do not lay a hand on them as they are accustomed to be corrected by flogging and now, this is the punishment. Almost losing themselves in tears, they ask pardon from the little Virgin. It was the only way they could reform for the better because I found them wild at times.” “The Virgin is the true teacher of my students and to her I entrust their progress in all aspects.”

SERMONS WITHOUT BIRETTAS BUT WITH RESULTS

Victoria laughs at herself whenever she gives counsel and talks to others; when, according to her, she gives “sermons without wearing biretta.” But with this and with all else, things go well. “One sees the girls react, and this reaction is carried over to their families. How consoling it is to think that through these means, families come to know and love Jesus Christ.”

The first days, there were only a few girls from the school who went with her to Mass. After a little while, the older girls followed suit. Later the young girls and young boys of the Catholic Action joined them. After some time, during feasts of the Virgin, the parish

priest managed to open the tabernacle and distribute Communion to a good number of the faithful who had never set foot in the Church. It is almost unbelievable! The Association of the Children of Mary has resurrected as well as the parish catechism, the Catholic Action circles, the month of May in the Church, the first Communion of the children, the enthusiasm for the Missions.

AND ADULTS TOO

Victoria expresses an opinion about herself “that as the days pass, she is becoming more of a “clown”, and that every day she thinks less of loving and serving God from the heart.” But nobody believes this. It is enough to look at her, to talk to her, to be with her a while. It is not only because one likes to listen to her as she tells the truth with meekness, but also because she faces reality with such nobility that it robs the heart. It is because the teacher from Hornachuelos, whether she teaches children or adults, never seeks herself, acts without egoism and never tries to dominate. On the contrary, she disposes people so that God may take possession of them. With this, people realize that they have received a treasure, joy fills the air, and they leave, happy to have been with her for a while: a man, who had pretensions of being a poet, whom Victoria earlier criticized, at the end, she called him “like Becquer”. The boy who wore the Catholic Action bracelet painted by the teacher herself, the companion who received an

idea better than her own, the woman whose house she rented, the woman who scrounged money to give to the poor, the old lady whom she instructed in catechism.

THE CASTANETS AS REMEMBRANCE

“I pass the days with my petty illnesses, but since they are not of prime importance, I do not worry so much. On the contrary, I try to accept what the Lord sends me, and in this, I think I have gained.”

This attitude pervades in everything. Let the wind blow where it wills, joy is constant. Sickness does nothing to Victoria, nor does exhausting work, nor family concerns nor solitude—“I am very much alone, so much so that I have no one to whom I can pour out my soul, many times sick at heart.” These, as well as the sorrow that things do not go well in Spain, vanish with Him before the tabernacle while putting into practice an infallible solution : “We make a strong crusade of prayer and penance.”

Victoria exudes good humor, joy and the charm typical of Andalucian women. This is how everyone remembers her. Such a lovely memory. Among her things, a pair of use-beaten castanets has been found.

AN ARTIST TEACHER

Yes, the teacher from Hornachuelos is an artist. In an instance, she has finished a painting, has decorated a room, has made a banner, has arranged some flowers, has made flower beds in the garden and has written some pages. With a touch here and there, she is capable of transforming the ugliest room into a beautiful and welcoming one.

Victoria is horrified with what is ugly, and this facilitates the artist to take a giant leap over what is vulgar and base. Above all, she has a marvelous formula to save the caustic artists of life: “One has to live realities, and if this reality is hard, is harsh, let us perfume it with sacrifice for this is more realistic than dreaming. And if sometimes we dream, let it be without end, with what can wholly fill our heart, because one day, perhaps not far away, we have the certainty of realizing this ideal.”

NOT MUCH REALLY

One does not realize how much Victoria can accomplish so many things, having such poor health. The whole morning and part of the afternoon, with night classes in the school, always in meetings, circles of study, catechisms, work in the sacristy of the Church. And then to take care of her mother and attend to sundry domestic needs.

Then, the preparation of lessons, correction of worksheets and exercises, exchange of ideas with other teachers who look up to Victoria for orientation and guidance, feast days with the girls, excursions with the students, letters to those outside Hornachuelos.

To study and to sew, to paint, to visit the families of the students and then to spend some time with the sick.

Yes, Victoria worked assiduously, listened much, looked with attention and tenderness, suffered with everyone, laughed heartily, taught the sevillana dance to young girls, but above all, she had Christ in her heart: "He knows very well that with laughter and with pain, I bear Him very deeply in my heart and on the front row."

JESUS CHRIST AT THE FRONT ROW

Naturally. No other explanation. Victoria's reason for being a teacher and an apostle is Jesus Christ. For love of Him, she became a teacher. To imitate Him in his apostolate of the Truth in the streets and in the Palestine villages, she remained in the world together with the Teresian Association and has made of her teaching an apostolate. For Jesus Christ, she chose to be in the streets, among men, like the first Christians so as to live in the midst of people hostile to God and to give them back to Him. Because of this, she fought interiorly with all her soul to draw herself and others closer to Jesus Christ. She knew that only when the voice of the apostle is recognized authentically as the voice of Christ, souls open themselves

to the message. The sheep follow Him -according to the Gospel-“because they know his voice.” (John 10: 4-5).

A ‘YES’ GIVEN TO GOD

“If it is necessary to give one’s life in order to identify myself with Christ, from this day forward I cease to exist because my life is only Christ, and my death, gain.” This was her great aim. The secret of her apostolate is her relationship with Christ. “ Before the tabernacle I find strength , comfort, lights, the sufficient love to take care of the souls entrusted to me.” The key to efficacy is forgetfulness of self. “I resolved not to look at myself but at Christ: to Him I consecrated the town, the children, and this consecration I repeated every hour, every instant, and He gives me strength. He sustains me. If it were not for this, I do not know what would have happened to me.”

Victoria, as teacher-apostle, was simply an immense YES given to God.

OUR TOWNS NEED A BLOOD BATH

Victoria had said YES and Jesus Christ had said WELL. It has become apparent that in Hornachuelos there was a need of blood. That is why I wrote in the beginning that the focal point of this story began when the teacher from Hornachuelos made that agreement with God: “Ask me a price.”

The period from 1931 to 1936 was a time of persecutions for the Church in Spain. Victoria knew that in Hornachuelos her life was in danger. “Our towns need blood bath,” she wrote during those days “who will be the first to give it?” She was timid and weak but this weakness happens to confound the strong.

FACE TO FACE WITH MARTYRDOM

July 1936 in Hornachuelos. Desecration and blasphemies. Detentions. Threats. An ambience of martyrdom among people of faith. Victoria was, since the beginning, prepared for what God wanted. “If a teresian teacher is not intrepid in holiness when the cause of God so demands it, where, therefore is our teresian spirit? I think that with fear and cowardice, we cannot call ourselves daughters of Saint Teresa. Whatever may happen, I shall never turn away my face from the Lord.”

AN INTREPID CO-WORKER

The parish priest of Hornachuelos used to call Victoria his co-worker, someone who always worked from the last line, discretely but efficiently. She knew how to give the initial and hardest drive in everything and then to disappear when everything goes well. The things of the Church kept with utmost care and immaculately clean, the tabernacle accompanied at

every moment, each terrain cleared and ready for the priestly hands to start sowing.

A co-worker up to the end. The parish priest of Hornachuelos was one of the first to be detained. Victoria, until she herself was imprisoned, fearlessly faced the ire of the masses, taking into her house the priest's sisters. She rivaled with them in Christian solicitude. Food, clothes, books—the prisoner lacked nothing during those days when charity meant a risk of death. And this was the least of it. Neither did the prisoner lack her prayer and her comfort. “Her path is the path of martyrdom. God forbid that it fails.” The corner of a handkerchief was enough for the ingenious zeal of Victoria to send messages of comfort like this.

I SEE THE HEAVENS OPEN

In the public square of Hornachuelos, at the left of the parish church, was the house where Victoria and the 17 companions for martyrdom were imprisoned. Through the grilled windows of the room Victoria occupied, one could see the door of the parish. By that window, looking with the eyes of the soul at the loved tabernacle of her town, the teacher from Hornachuelos prepared for her martyrdom. At two o'clock in the morning on August 12th, the doors of the prison were brusquely opened. The hour has come. All the prisoners came out two by two through the back door of the house, surrounded by guns and fierce faces. Victoria was the only woman in the group.

They walked twelve kilometers to a field crossing the tragic hollow of the Rincon mine. The horror and agony of that bloodcurdling dawn was tempered with Victoria's intrepid words to her companions who were trembling and beside themselves with fear and fatigue: "Courage! Hurry, the prize awaits us."

Teacher up to the last moment, she taught these men how to die. One by one, those 17 men climbed to the mouth of the mine's well to receive the rain of bullets, eyes alight with faith strengthened by the words that Victoria tirelessly repeated to each one:

"I SEE THE HEAVENS OPEN."

At the end, her turn came. After so much anguish, will that insignificant young woman give up?

She knelt at the mouth of the well, looked straight at the guns, opened her arms in the form of a cross .

"I cannot say otherwise. I have to say what I believe. Long live Christ the King. And looking at the little image of the Virgin that she held in her arms: Long live my Mother!"

A FINISHED DIARY

Victoria's diary says this in one of the pages:

“What shall I do, Lord, to please you more?”

“I surrender myself wholly to your most adorable plan: Do what you will of me because I belong entirely to you, but do not forget my petition.”

“Let your charity transform me, that in it I may burn and in it I may be purified. Inspire me with your spirit of truth and your simplicity that I may attract souls. Clothe me with your strength and your courage for the battle that awaits me in the world...”

A petition visibly granted. And another not verified by human eyes, but undoubtedly granted also because Jesus Christ never forgets his covenant.

“Queen of the angels, most blessed Mother, LET NO ONE FROM THIS TOWN BE LOST. Pray for us.”

This was written by Victoria at the back of a holy picture of the Patron of Hornachuelos that she always carried with her.