

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

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Here are excerpts taken from a chapter from Marta Diciotti's book called *Una Vita con Maria Valtorta (Life with Maria Valtorta)*. As this book has not yet been translated into English, I hope to bring you more passages in future supplements. As a reader requested, this is about Maria and Professor Lorenzo Ferri whose names are joined in their book of images called **Valtorta & Ferri**.

On a spiritual level, look at what we learnt about special people after their death: Padre Pio and his demonic attacks; Mother Teresa and her dark night of the soul which lasted many years; and Mary Mackillop and her 'drinking' problem.

Where did we learn this? From testimonies written by people surrounding them.

Maria Valtorta's situation is no different. We know more about Maria than she would ever have readily shared, through the writings of Marta Diciotti, who looked after her.

Marta Diciotti was orphaned at a young age, but her mother often appeared in a dream to Maria, recommending that her daughter be welcomed in her home as a servant to the Valtorta family. Maria, herself, told her mother to treat Marta as a daughter.

After Maria Valtorta died, Marta wrote a book called *A Life with Maria Valtorta*. People who reviewed the book say that Marta's style of writing is hard to read - her thoughts are disordered with frequent repetition, but there is certainly a sign of humility there. It doesn't help that it is compared to Maria's style, which is often regarded as fascinating, of great interest, of the highest spiritual and cultural benefit, it elevates the soul and a work that gives pleasure to the reader.

In contrast, Marta's style of writing is considered less engaging, although, personally, I didn't mind it at all because the content was very interesting. I also enjoyed her simple style.

However, for the Valtorta scholar, these same critics/reviewers say that it is a document that definitely should be read and meditated on because it is an authentic mine of facts, many of which are unpublished, and Marta is an amazing witness to the holiness of Maria Valtorta and to the authenticity of the revelations received.

So what does Marta tell us?

Marta says:

'Professor Lorenzo Ferri met Maria Valtorta when she had completely finished her mission as a sacred writer. He was led into this house by Fr. Berti who had first met him in Rome. They got along well. Ferri had spoken to Father Berti about his study of the Holy Shroud. As an enthusiastic artist, his deep desire was to know the face of Christ in his human-earthly reality, and he said this to Maria. Ferri knew her from her writings but he was very sceptical of Maria. He didn't believe her and he had no desire to meet her. He used to say: "But Father Berti, she's a woman. She's one of those visionaries. Who knows?"

Father Berti would reply: "No. no. Look, Professor. This is an educated woman. A very intelligent person." Father Berti finally convinced him and brought him here to Viareggio on Palm Sunday in 1950 by car.

With Maria, who has always been very prudent with her highly critical and observant nature, and the Professor, who did not come across as one who believed and trusted easily, there was a rapid, intense and immediate clash. Ferri, who had brought his artistic material with him, quickly and easily drew the profile image of Jesus, which was over Maria's bedhead. Maria watched him. You could say that she directed his hand. "No Professor, not like that, but like this...and this..." Or she would say: "This is good but that isn't right. It is like this" or "It's longer" or "He's taller." or "Wider." Both of them had the same intention of creating an image in a short time. This experience at their first meeting immediately became the norm till the end. The sketching got faster under the guidance of Maria, which looked like it was flying on the canvas.

In the summer of 1950, Ferri returned to Viareggio and painted the face of Christ front-on that was on the wall over Maria's bedhead. He couldn't look at it without feeling a true sense of shame knowing that it was, in fact, something sacred, moving him to think that it was really Jesus there present. Ferri had conceded that Jesus was actually there "posing" for him in the present moment, and that He was not just being described from a memory of an image in Maria's mind. This time, the painter did not produce it so rapidly like the profile shot of Jesus over Maria's bed. It took more effort, more observation and Maria's direction: "No. Look, Professor, His nose is like this whereas His mouth is...and His chin has a beard like this...no, shorter...but this part is a bit longer..." and so forth. What's more, the colour of Jesus' eyes and hair presented a huge problem. The artist had to return so many more times, and the work was so much harder.

However, I remember the blood-red paint colour he used and how it was made from that powdery red-maroon brick that floated everywhere. We even found it on the sheets, on the blankets, and it even penetrated through to the bed! Oh, the dust was on the floor, on the furniture, even after having vacuumed properly. It even went up our nose, which then stained the handkerchiefs. It was also in our food, which I could tell from the red stain that was left around the rim of the saucepan. In fact, the dust floated up in the air before floating down.

Ferri, however, had a lot to do on that portrait. It was really hard work and he tried to adopt the strict guidance given by Maria

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because for her, it was something very precious. After this portrait was finished, Maria said to me: "That man was very kind in allowing me to see him again, even though I had to guide him for most of the painting with such precision. But that man really has succeeded in capturing the image of Jesus."

Thanks to Ferri, I was able to have this painting. Of course, you could say that it was a success because it captured the divine within the human. This was obvious. I don't know if Maria told Ferri that Jesus was also present and that she could see Him, but considering the fact that Ferri had reservations about Maria, I think she would have kept it quiet and not made him feel uncomfortable or upset. In fact, he had to work in silence in order to get the maximum direction from her for such an important work that would help him achieve an old dream that he had.

I know that at a certain point, Maria said: "That's enough...it's okay just like this...don't touch it anymore...Professor, don't touch it up anymore because it couldn't have turned out better than this."

This work was sent to Father Berti but he didn't keep it because he thought it was too generous a gift. If I remember correctly, Ferri continued to come to Viareggio every so often, but it was in 1952 that he started to work with Maria again, which was an intense time because Ferri spent so many hours a day beside Maria's bed, working extremely rapidly on the twelve Apostles. This work took two to three years.

Once I remember Maria decisively said: "Professor, follow my instructions because I'm the one who can actually see Him here while you can't." Maria could see Him on this occasion, and not just remember Jesus' face from the written description. That is why she spoke with such certainty. Maria would say: "And you, Marta. And you, Victoria (Ferri's wife who went everywhere he went). Please go back to the kitchen so that you don't burn something on the stove." Maria would then continue: "Professor don't waste time. Follow what I say because things are the way I am describing them to you and how I see Him." Ferri had a folio of sketches with the characteristics of people of different races. He would often consult them when Maria described a person from a different place. He was always stumped by her accuracy of the characteristics of Jewish people.

The work continued intensely at a lively rhythm but the black powder was worse than the red, which floated in the air and landed in places you wouldn't even think. Ferri was rather small, rotund, nice and open, and even though he wasn't Roman, after spending time in Rome, he adopted their way of speaking. He slept on the couch in the lounge room of his house, maybe because the stairs annoyed him. He had four or five children, a wife, and an epileptic girl who was their servant. Those 6 or 7 people occupied the first floor of his home. They lived in a disordered environment with no routine. Ferri's wife, Victoria, was a good woman, but maybe not the right wife for an artist because of the hours, his way of doing things and the discipline with which he did them. The artist's life was not normal. She was a beautiful woman, an ex model. She always stayed with him and she would not move. She followed him everywhere. In his family, there was an insatiable thirst for money to maintain the lifestyle they wanted.

Professor Ferri understood without a doubt, the greatness of the work he was doing. He was easy to get on with but he spoke to people using informal language. He spoke like this to me, to Pisani and even to Father Berti. However, he always spoke formally to Maria (he used the polite form) because he had a real sense of admiration for her. Many times, he declared that it was a great honour for him to be able to join his name to hers – Valtorta & Ferri. When he wanted to capture a scene described in *The Poem*, he would first read it with Maria. The resurrection of Lazarus turned out beautifully because he had followed Maria's instructions faithfully. I think that poor Professor Ferri must have been out of breath so many times while he worked beside her because Maria worked him at such a rapid pace.

He wanted to make a bronze clay bust of her. What a shame that he never did, that he never accomplished that project. He did a beautiful portrait of Fr. Migliorini which really looked like him. When she died, Ferri did not come to the funeral and he did not even send a telegram. However he felt affection for Maria, and he was devoted and grateful to this creature who had given him the opportunity of having such a unique experience.' (pp. 288-296)

HOW I BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD by Sr. Christine Kabumbu from Zambia

God works in very mysterious ways and the coming of the Heavenly gift of the *Poem of the Man-God* is one of those mysteries of God. In 1999, I was doing postgraduate studies. I was on holiday at our Mother House and while there, I had an attack of malaria. I was on medication, so I could not sleep well. While struggling, I remembered something I read - that if you want to sleep, listen to a boring music or read a boring book. The latter was appealing so I got up and went to the community's library. I searched for a boring book and my eyes fell on a thick book with the word 'poem'. Immediately, I thought that a big book of poems should but be boring. I even wondered how someone could even write so many to fill a volume as thick as this volume four! I picked it up and went back to my room. I opened it, anxiously, reading it to help me sleep when I found the 'poem' was about Jesus walking with His apostles on a dusty road on His way to Jericho. I wondered how someone would even think of writing a story in the form of a poem about Jesus. I did not even finish a page because I fell asleep.

The following morning, I had to travel back to school so I packed my things and left. While I was at the University, I got a phone call from my niece who happened to be a nurse and a sister in my congregation. She told me that she was in Lusaka where I was and that she had a parcel for me. I got excited and wanted to know what it was. She told me joyfully that she had brought the book I had forgotten in the room where I was sleeping during my illness. I wasn't pleased to hear this and I retorted that I had not left behind any book. My niece insisted that the book must belong to me so she decided to bring it since she thought I needed it for my studies.

I was sure it belonged to the community. I was a bit upset so I just took the book and threw it in my locker right behind my clothes so that I would not see it until I went back there for another holiday and return the book on the shelf. During my studies, I had a very devout lay friend named Maria. We used to share a lot of spiritual books. One day as we were coming from Mass, she told me about a very good book she had read somewhere, which she recommended. I asked her for details of the book but she said she was not too sure. I asked her why she couldn't bring it, and she said the owner of the book was not willing to let go of it. So that was the end of that.

In mid-1999, I was selected to go to Tanzania for a research program for three months. While in Tanzania, I met a devout Catholic man. At the end of the program, I decided to give him a spiritual book as a gift. When he received my gift, he told me that he would have liked to have given me a book but he couldn't because the set of books he had was a gift from Belgium and they were very special so he would not give them out. So I asked him about the title and he told me it was a book about Jesus the Man-God but he could not remember the writer's name. He emphasised that I should look for this book. Back in Zambia, Maria was happy to see me. She told me that she had more information about the author of the book who was Italian and whose name was Maria Val-something, and the title was like

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Man-God. With this information, something clicked in my mind. I thought of the book referred to by the Tanzanian man and the book I threw behind my clothes, which I remembered only as a poem written by someone called Maria. I told my friend that I had the book and would like to go check. I doubled my pace and was almost running to my room. As soon as I reached it, I went straight to the locker and fumbled through my clothes to retrieve the book. I got the thick volume and stared at its cover! There was the author of the book, Maria Valtorta, and the title: *The Poem of the Man-God*, Volume four. I could not believe my eyes. The mystery had been solved. The book I only thought was poetry, was actually the same that the two devout Catholics had been talking to me about. I rushed out of the room, ran downstairs calling out to my friend. I showed her the book and she screamed in acknowledgement. She grabbed it and held it to her heart. It was a day of jubilation. She asked me how long I had the book and where I got it from. I told her that for the last six months, I had hidden it behind my clothes and what had led to this.

Realizing that there were five volumes in the set, she was quick to ask about the others. I couldn't remember but from then on, I couldn't wait go back to search for the rest. I felt a real thirst. When I finally went back to the convent library, I found nine volumes gathering dust. The Sisters were so surprised to see how thrilled I was to have those books. Taking them back with me to the University, I shared them with other devout students and friends but these books were no longer enough. My friend Maria photocopied many more copies using her whole salary every month!

THE EFFECT OF MARIA VALTORTA'S WRITINGS ON MY STUDENT LIFE

Allow me to use *the Poem of the Man-God* in my presentation, instead of *the Gospel as Revealed to Me* because this was the title of my first acquaintance with this treasure and it is still familiar to me.

The dramatic coming of *the Poem of the Man God* into my life happened when I was studying for a Master's degree. It was a time when I was very busy with academic work. As a religious, I was obliged to pray the daily office, attend Mass and fulfill spiritual exercises, which included spiritual reading besides my studies. Most of the time, due to the pressure of work, spiritual reading used to suffer much. After I encountered the *Poem of the Man God*, academic studies were no longer a priority. My mission was to read. I recall how my life felt so empty after finishing the fourth volume, (which I discovered and read first) and I had not yet mobilized the rest of the volumes. I felt something missing and I thirsted for more of the volumes. My spiritual life completely changed and I no longer felt too busy to do my spiritual reading. The more I read of *the Poem of the Man-God*, the more my life changed.

Often, when religious sisters have to do studies, their spiritual life often suffers greatly because one has to fulfil academic obligations, which was also the case with me. After discovering *the Poem*, things changed because Jesus took control of everything, He became so meaningful and close. I felt my Master's degree meant nothing without Jesus. I graduated from the school of Jesus rather than from the school of natural sciences. Some people, and even the Sisters, felt something was not fine with me after my graduation because my daily talk was about the Jesus I had encountered in the *Poem of the Man-God*. If Jesus had come for me just prior to or after my graduation, I was sure to go to Heaven. After we Sisters complete our studies at secular institutions, it is a bit disorientating getting back into community living. However, fitting

back into our religious community after my graduation was more than easy because I had advanced; I was on a higher plane with regard to my religious and Christian life. I was very prayerful and I was aglow with the spirit.

LEADERSHIP ROLE

In 2000, I was elected as a councilor in the leadership team of my congregation. One thing I remember very well was when the results of the election came out. When our then Apostolic Vicar for Religious (now a bishop) who was my spiritual director, congratulated me, he teased me saying, "You see? This is where Maria Valtorta has led you, so be ready for challenges." This was like a prophesy.

It is 2016 and I am now the Superior General of my congregation. It has been the most turbulent of my human life. What role has Maria Valtorta's works played in my life? I remember the words of Jesus to His apostles when He was about to face death. He warned His apostles about how they will be scattered when the time of His trial would come and He too will be abandoned by His Father. I believe the Faith, which the reading of Maria Valtorta's works instilled in me, has kept me sane! There are many, many inspiring words in the works of Maria Valtorta which I have amassed and use for my meditation and counsel. They speak to me very profoundly because it is Jesus, Mary and the Apostles speaking to me directly. (My vision is to have all the quotations I have collected printed into a booklet, which would be a treasure for me.)

VALTORTA EFFECT

Through the writings of Maria Valtorta, I have come to love the name of Jesus. I see the way the apostles, the Mother, children etc call the Lord by His first name; Jesus. So familiar. I love this so much. There are many times when my conversations with my Valtorta reader friends just centres on the writings. Just picking various events in the life of Jesus or certain characters make very interesting conversation. I don't tire talking about events and it makes the distance shorter when we are traveling such a long distance. We can spend a night just chatting on various topics from the works. Which conversation would surpass talking about Jesus of the *Poem of the Man-God*? Some people, in a mocking way during my leadership phase, have nicknamed me Maria Valtorta, but I say; what a great name to attribute to me, a mere nothing.

SOME PROFOUND EXPERIENCES FROM THE WORKS

These are my memorable experiences of how deeply the Valtorta works can affect people who open their hearts. I remembered my late elder sister when she read the episode of the passion and death of Our Lord. My sister could not contain herself. She was going mad and could not sit still but started going round the house just to get rid of her emotions. Before my sister died (much later), after being acquainted with Valtorta's works, she looked forward to dying to meet the Man-God. Another experience was that of a teacher who was dying. I used to go to him to read the *Poem of the Man God* during his sickness. Each time I arrived with the volume, the sick man would sit up, weak as he was, to give glory and praise to God who he said had spoken to him more than ever in his life. The teacher cried tears of joy for having encountered God just before his death. The man died happily having received the gift, as he put it, of hearing the voice of God. These two experiences left a deep impression on my life and I always wished many people would open-handedly and open-heartedly receive the works of Maria Valtorta and not miss something great.

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MARIA VALTORTA: SCIENCE AND FAITH CONVERGE by Zenit Journalist, Rita Ricci - 27 October 2016 (This is an article written by a journalist who visited the Conference in Italy)

The life and works of the mystic of Viareggio have been examined by international scholars who have pointed out the astonishing agreement between her visions and the times of Jesus.

Many wonder who Maria Valtorta is and why her life and her writings capture so much attention, and it is precisely for those who are still unaware of her that the Valtorta Foundation has organized a first international conference to become familiar with the prodigies of the mystic of Viareggio, who is known in the United States, Canada, Europe, Oceania, Australia, as well as Italy, where she lived until her death, in 1961.

A two-day conference, on October 22 and 23, 2016, to get to know her work *L'Evangelo come mi è stato rivelato* [*The Gospel as Revealed to Me*], which recounts the life of Jesus, of his mother, Mary, and of all the apostles, in a clear and simple way, and enriched with more facts than the canonical Gospels of Luke, John, Matthew, and Mark. Certain aspects were examined in particular: the astronomical and geological data that scientifically correspond between Valtorta's narrative and the skies of two thousand years ago, as attested by NASA programs. And it is precisely the scientific data that amazes and captures our attention. Many scientists over the course of the years – astronomers, physicists, and geologists – have approached her work, at first with the intention of contesting it, but in the end being fascinated and astounded by the vividness of her descriptions, which meticulously illustrate the climatic conditions of those days, the many places in the Holy Land that are unknown to most people, and the movements of the stars and planets that shone at that time in the skies, all of which have been scientifically proven.

Among the first to become passionate and to undertake research was the French engineer Jean-François Lavère – who was absent from the conference for personal reasons. For 25 years, he studied Valtorta's work systematically, collecting more than 10,000 pieces of evidence in various fields, including the arts, astronomy, fauna, ethnology, geography, geology, history and geopolitics, metrology, the social sciences and religion, analyzing them and comparing them with different sources. The result published in his *Enigma Valtorta I* (2012) and *Enigma Valtorta II* (2016) is a scientific validation of 99.6% of the data: an outcome, to say the least, disconcerting for a simple woman like Maria Valtorta, confined to her bed, semi-paralyzed since 1934, who had neither the technical instruments to reconstruct such a distant era nor the cognitive means.

In the same vein as Lavère, ranks the work of another engineer, Stephen Austin, from the United States, a young thirty-year old man. He originally ran up against this mystic's work for the sole purpose of repudiating it, but he then ended up subdued by the completeness and beauty of her *The Poem of the Man-God* (now known as *The Gospel as Revealed to Me*) to such extent that he dedicated four years of research to compile his e-book in English *A Summa & Encyclopedia to Maria Valtorta's Extraordinary Work* and present it to the public, at this first International meeting. Constantly updated, Stephen's work has 13 chapters and 49 sub-chapters, in which he introduces *The Gospel as Revealed to Me* to readers. The theological objections of the Church against private revelations are eviscerated in this e-book by a careful investigation of the approval that Valtorta's work has received from saints and prelates: Saint Padre Pio and Saint Teresa of Calcutta; Pope Pius XII; cardinals, archbishops and bishops; 23 doctors of theology, divinity, or canon law; 16

university professors; etc. Stephen Austin then compares Valtorta's visions with those of the other mystics, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich and Venerable Mary of Agreda, both of which are less detailed and less accurate. He also emphasizes the almost absolute correlation between the Gospel and the text of Viareggio's mystic, with the difference that, compared with the 141 days of Jesus' ministry in the Sacred Scriptures, there are in *The Gospel as Revealed to Me* about 500 days, presented in much greater detail, historically valid, on account of the valuable and unique information on botany, geography, ethnology, and astronomy. Austin's e-book is known as far as Oceania and Australia, thanks to his promotional work, which included participating in an interview on the Australian TV program of a religious nature *Spirit of Life*.

From the astronomical point of view, the studies are diversified. Noteworthy among these for its accuracy and exhaustiveness is the research of the Italian Liberato De Caro, physicist and researcher of the Centro Nazionale di Ricerche [National Research Center], who has investigated the mystic's work from the historical-astronomical point of view, verifying the night sky proposed by her with a map of the sky from NASA software programs. His 2014 book *I cieli raccontano* [*The Heavens Declare*] establishes that the Crucifixion of Jesus – as opposed to the date A.D. 30 chosen by Lavère, who attributes to the mystic a greater error percentage – would have occurred on April 23 of A.D. 34 (Julian calendar) in the [Jewish] month of Nisan, during an embolismic year (that is, a year with 13 lunar months). A result that certifies the mystic's reliability – whose error percentage is less than 0.84% – by explaining how the Passover, for two years in a row, would have fallen on a Friday: something impossible in the Hebrew calendar, except for this particular year, A.D. 34. Of great help was the accurate description of the vault of heaven on March 15 of A.D. 33 (Julian) near the Baths of Gadara – dated as such on the basis of the astronomical positions supplied by *The Gospel as Revealed to Me* – reported in detail by the mystic who describes exactly the position of Mars and the constellations, as if she had been an eyewitness.

The same conclusions have been reached also by a geologist, Thomas Dubé, of Seattle, U.S.A. For 25 years, he has analyzed the historical-chronological correspondence between the Gospels and *The Gospel as Revealed to Me*, in order to reconstruct the crucial aspects of the nativity of Jesus. For the scientist, who calculated the differences between the Hebrew and Gregorian calendars and comparing his results with the studies of the theoretical physicist Dr. Lonnie Lee Van Zandt, Jesus would have lived 1738 weeks and one day, and would have therefore been born during the night of December 27/28 of 1 B.C. [Gregorian, or December 29/30 in Julian] and crucified in A.D. 34, on April 23 (Julian calendar), which coincides with April 21, A.D. 34 according to our [Gregorian] calendar. Such a concurrence between two previously unknown scholars shows the scientific reliability of Valtorta's writings, which have enabled two men from different continents and professions to arrive at the same results.

Universality, clarity, and specificity are the cornerstones of Valtorta's message, as it is through those intrinsic characteristics that it has conquered more and more the attention of scientists, saints, theologians, and ordinary people, thus promoting the spreading of the message of Christ throughout the world, with no harm to the doctrine of the Church – in fact contributing to the evangelization of the most skeptical.