

## CLARE MARY OF THE PASSION (1610-1675) Venerable (D)

Born at Orsogna (Chieti) on April 11, 1610, of Philip Colonna, duke of Paliano, and of Lucretia Tomacelli, Clare Mary was baptized with the name of Joan Victoria. On Jan. 7, 1623, she was entrusted to the Augustinian nuns of the monastery of St. Joseph of the Ruffi, in Naples. Three years later, on Oct. 21, 1626, she was overcome by the grace of a complete conversion, marked by a first vision of Christ and strengthened the following year by a vow of virginity. In a vision God had shown her a monastery of Discalced Carmelite nuns and gave her to understand that He wanted her among the daughters of St. Teresa. However, her confessor urged her to join the Augustinian nuns of the Ruffi; she followed his advice, promising to make her profession in their community.

Her family brought her back to Genazzano in 1627 and later to Rome, where she withstood her father and Louis William, prince of Paterno, who wished to marry her. By chance she learned of the monastery of St. Giles in Trastevere /Rome/, in which she recognized the small Teresian house shown to her in her vision. With the authorization of Pope Urban VIII, she took the Carmelite habit there on Oct. 4, 1628. On Oct. 4 of the following year she made her profession, taking the name of Clare Mary of the Passion. In 1643 she was elected prioress, an office in which she was afterwards confirmed. In 1654 she was sent to found the new Monastery of the Queen of Heaven, erected by her sister, Anne Colonna-Barberini; and after three years as vicaress, in 1657 she was elected prioress and reconfirmed three times. She governed the monastery with wisdom and prudence, maintaining a rare equilibrium full of faith and charity. She died on June 22, 1675; her remains lie in the church of the small monastery which the Carmelite nuns ejected at the foot of the Janiculum after the suppression of 1873 and the transformation of the old house into a penal institution. In 1676 the processes of beatification were begun, and crowned with the declaration of the heroic virtues of the venerable on Aug. 22, 1762.

The outstanding characteristic of Clare Mary is a deep spiritual life, enriched by mystical graces and extraordinary charisms which make her one of the exceptional souls of her time. She was in contact with great masters of the spirit, and had the good fortune for twenty years (1647-1667) of being under the direction of Father John of St. Jerome, a Discalced Carmelite (1579-1667), who followed her in an admirable manner and ordered her to record briefly what she was experiencing in her ascent to God. Everything was then gathered together and immediately transcribed by her wise director, who in this way put together a voluminous Report on the graces that God gave to Mother Clare Mary of the Passion, a Discalced Carmelite nun, during mental prayer and in the interior commerce that she had with His Divine Majesty, and of the virtues that she practiced in the same commerce. (Ms. in the general archive of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers in Rome). This is an unpublished document of very valuable mystical doctrine, in which the evolution and progress of the venerable can be followed almost day by day for twenty years.

Clare Mary appears as the recipient of God's action from the very first instant of her conversion. Faithful to the inspirations and to the activity of grace, she abandoned herself generously to the divine will, immersing herself in a climate of prayer which very soon showed the characteristics of infused contemplation. On her part, there appeared the will to detach herself from everything, the ever more compelling exercise of heroic virtues and, above all, an ever more profound living of the theological virtues. On the part of God there was a passive purification by means of very painful «nights», after which, on Dec. 17, 1649, she was elevated to spiritual marriage and to the divine transformation of love, with mystical graces that find a comparison only in the greatest saints. Repeatedly, and sometimes for long periods, she was admitted to the vision and contemplation of the greatest mysteries of God. She experienced the presence of the Trinity in her heart and often intellectually the presence of Jesus and Mary.

The influence of Christ and of His holy humanity on the interior and mystical life of Clare Mary was extraordinary. This life — because of its Christocentric, mystical ardor, because of its spirit of union with Jesus that tended to the imitation and assimilation of His life and His mysteries, because of the continual mortification and prayer sustained by an intense sacramental life and by unconditional attachment to the Church — remains one of the most interesting witnesses of authentic Catholic mysticism. This all occurred precisely at the time when in Rome, even among persons close to Clare Mary, the quietistic tendencies that were to find publicity with Michael Molinos, whose *Spiritual Guide* was published at Rome in 1675, were maturing.

Clare Mary had a noteworthy influence on the Church life of her time. She had blood relationship with noble families and so was sought out for counsel even by popes and cardinals; hence, guided by a constant supernatural spirit, she was able to use her influence to suggest useful reforms and for the good of souls. Urban VIII, Innocent X, Alexander VII, Clement IX, and Clement X held her dear. Bl. Innocent XI, while he was still a cardinal, was particularly fond of her; and she repeatedly foretold his election to the papacy, even in writing.

She was especially devoted to St. Joseph, whose protection she was to experience in a miraculous way; and she labored untiringly to promote his liturgical cult. When she did not succeed in having his feast of March 19 raised to a double of the first class for the universal Church, as she would have wished, she worked so that the feast would have at least the rank of second class; and this was granted to her by Clement X on Dec. 6, 1670. She also used her influence to have John Cardinal Bona compose the proper hymns in the best manner possible. To her is also due the composition, on the part of Urban VIII, of the proper hymns and lessons for the office of St. Teresa (1629), of which she later obtained the extension to the whole Church with a rite of semi-double by concession of Pope Innocent X (1645).

Noteworthy too was her influence over Christina of Sweden, who wished to spend periods of retreat and solitude in the cloister of the monastery of the Queen of Heaven, experiencing the Carmelite life and communing with the venerable in conversations of

prayer and mysticism upon «graces of contemplation and of union» (as the processes say) and in discussions on the doctrine of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross.

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