

MAGDALEN OF ST. JOSEPH (Magdalen du Bois de Fontaines, 1578-1637)
Venerable (D)

Magdalen was born in Paris on May 17, 1578, into a family from Tours. She was the sixth of fifteen children, and grew up in Paris and in Tours; here, in 1603, she met Peter de Berulle, who was about to introduce the Teresian Carmel into France. Won over by the ideal proposed by the future cardinal, she decided to join the Discalced Carmelites; and in July, 1604, in Paris, she joined the group which, under the guidance of Barbara Acarie (the future Bl. Mary of the Incarnation), was being prepared to embrace the reform of Teresa.

On Oct. 17, 1604, after the first Discalced Carmelite nuns had arrived from Spain, Magdalen and her companions entered the monastery of the Incarnation, built for them in Paris; on Nov. 12, 1605, she became the first professed nun of the group. On the following day, Bl. Anne of St. Bartholomew, the companion and confidant of St. Teresa, named the young nun mistress of novices, an office that she held for two and a half years. Thus she shaped the first generation of French Discalced Carmelite nuns who were afterward to diffuse the Teresian flame throughout the nation and were always upheld by the prayer, the counsels and the prudence of Magdalen.

On April 20, 1608, Magdalen was elected prioress, and immediately showed her spiritual and apostolic maturity in the guidance of her religious and in the spread of the Teresian ideal. Reelected in 1611, she ruled the monastery until March of 1615. Then, in July of this year, she was sent to Tours to help the prioress of the monastery there which had been established by Magdalen's father; the local prioress was, in fact, little prepared for the direction of the monastery. Then after a brief stop in Paris (March-July, 1616), on July 8, 1616, she founded the monastery of Lyons, and on Sept.

7, 1617, another in Paris dedicated to the «Mother of God». To this foundation she brought Catherine of Jesus (d. 1623), the celebrated mystic of whom Magdalen was the confidant, the guide and, after her death, on the insistence of the queen, Marie de'Medici, her biographer. In 1624 she was called back to the monastery of the Incarnation in Paris and was reelected prioress, in which office she remained until 1635. She died in Paris, in the first monastery of the Incarnation, on April 30, 1637.

Her process was begun in 1645; in 1650 the cause was introduced at Rome. When the decree of heroicity of her virtues seemed imminent, various contingent historical circumstances, extrinsic to the cause itself, halted it. This until July 16, 1789, when Pius VI promulgated the decree that recognized such heroicity. Then the French revolution completely halted the cause, which seemed to be progressing again with success, as a result, too, of the graces that were attributed to the intercession of the venerable.

Magdalen is one of the figures of greater distinction in the vast and glorious band of «spirituals» of the «grand century» of France. Very highly esteemed by St. Francis de Sales and by St. Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal, she was particularly dear to Card, de

Berulle, whom she upheld and encouraged in the foundation of the Oratory and whom she followed in the spirituality centered on the Incarnate Word and His mysteries. At her request, and following the summary notes that she had outlined, G. Gibieuf composed *La vie et les grandeurs de la tres sainte Vierge* (Paris, 1637), which in many passages reflects the thought and the teaching of Magdalen. Pope Urban VIII, Marie de'Medici, Louise de Marillac, Richelieu had called on her with esteem and with confidence in her prayers and asked her for counsel even on political matters. St. Vincent de Paul was also in contact with her, and at the process of beatification gave his written testimony about her virtues.

Humble, simple, smiling, she enjoyed divine communications from a tender age. God poured out His grace in her, above all through the sacred humanity of Christ. She participated in the mysteries of Christ's life in a special, mystical way. These graces nourished her faith and her charity to an eminent degree and increased her fervor for the Eucharist, her devotion to the Church, and her zeal for the salvation of souls. In the midst of her mystical graces and in contact with so many souls who had recourse to her for counsel about the secret ways of God, she followed the absolute norm of relying in everything upon the Church and its decisions. She was convinced that, even if someone came face to face with true charisms, «that which comes from the Church's part and which is based upon its authority is incomparably better».

A Teresian soul, formed by distinguished nuns who had been in contact with the Saint of Avila, she sought to form herself and her daughters according to the spirit of prayer typical of the Carmelite reform. Hence it can be said that by her counsels and her influence she shaped all of the forty-seven Carmels erected in France during the period between her first priorate and her death. Her still unedited letters show this. Her influence can also be seen in her short work: *La vie de Soeur Catherine de Jesus, religieuse de l'Ordre de Notre Dame du Mont-Carmel, estably en, France, selon la reformation de notre Mere sainte Therese de Jesus, decedee a Paris le dix-neuvieme fevrier 1613* (Toulouse, 1625; Paris, 16262; 16283; 16314; 16565; reprinted in Paris, 1929). Besides the biographical profile of her spiritual daughter, Magdalen provided a collection of ascetical writings and letters. After her death there was published also the booklet: *Avis de la Yen. Mere Madeleine de Saint-Joseph pour la conduite des novices* (Paris, 1672) and, in our century, *L'oraison a l'ecole de la ven. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph* (Clamart, 1939; 19492), an organic collection of thoughts of the venerable, drawn from her letters and spiritual fragments. Recently, Peter Serouet published *Lettres spirituelles* of the venerable (Bruges-Paris, 1965).

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