

MARGARET OF THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT (Margaret Parigot, 1619-1648)
Venerable (D)

Margaret was born at Beaune (Cote d'Or) on Feb;. 6, 1619. From her earliest childhood she gave proof of extraordinary virtue: she was only seven years old, in fact, when she would spend entire nights at prayer, even during the winter; moreover, she cared for the sick in the hospice and did not hesitate to kiss their wounds. After the death of her parents, when she was twelve and a half years old, she asked to be admitted among the Discalced Carmelite nuns of her native city (1630). Her youthful age notwithstanding; her request was granted, thanks to the reputation that she enjoyed. Critical studies leave no doubt about this fact.

The young postulant thus entered into an exceptional environment, one profoundly permeated by the most authentic traditions of Carmel, among them a touching devotion to the Child Jesus. This devotion had its origins in two sources: the teaching of Cardinal de Berulle, and the practices of the Spanish foundresses of the French Carmel.

Peter de Berulle, during the course of a trip to Spain, made in 1604 in order to study the introduction of the Teresian Carmel into France, had had occasion to meet with the protagonists of devotion to the infancy of Christ. At Alcalá de Henares he had been able to talk with the lay brother Francis of the Child Jesus, whose role in the development of this devotion was to be so important. Moreover, the cardinal had met the provincial of Castile, Joseph of Jesus Mary, the admirer and future biographer of the holy lay brother. Finally, he had chosen as prioress of the first French monastery Anne of Jesus, to whom Francis wrote that the foundation was willed and protected by the Child Jesus Himself.

From then on, the motif of the infancy of the Incarnate Word was to become one of the most frequent subjects of the cardinal's discourses. However, he left his own strong imprint on the devotion that he strove to spread. The Carmelite nuns were sensitive to the attraction of the «tender age» of the Child, and willingly stressed the aspects of sweetness and of love. Berulle knew this aspect; but he preferred to honor the infancy as a life «of privation», since he loved to contemplate in this state of the Incarnate Word «His subjection to the conditions of nature and of infancy» (*Correspondence II*, 1937, p. 17). He paid more attention to the actions of the Child Jesus or to the events mentioned in the Gospel; his «metaphysical» piety went beyond the «mystery», to the «interior state».

This concept urged him to search out all the aspects of the infancy: the dependence of Jesus, the absence of communication with others, the silence, the humiliation of His wisdom, the hiding of His power, the graces of humility, of purity, and of docility. These sublime considerations did not hinder him from proposing divers ways of putting the devotion into practice. For Berulle, it was not enough to «adore» the Child Jesus; one had also to «implore Him,» to ask Him for the graces of His state of infancy. Above all, he insisted that the devotion to a mystery of dependence should be translated into

actions of strict dependence. It was a question, therefore, of a spirituality, of a way of living Christianity.

Under the influence of such directives, the French Carmelites, whose foundations had spread throughout the kingdom within twenty years, were induced «to apply themselves» to the infancy of Jesus and to become «like a child, in order to honor Him in an identical state of life.» Catherine of Jesus, of Bordeaux (1589-1623), a professed nun in the Carmel of the Incarnation at Paris, was to synthesize in her person the principal tendencies of devotion to the infancy of Christ, as Berulle conceived it. But such a devotion was too metaphysical Or purely interior for the majority of Christians; only with difficulty could it reach beyond the circle of the cloister or of the devout. It was for Margaret Parigot, who in taking the habit in the Carmel of Beaune had become Margaret of the Most Blessed Sacrament, to spread it among the masses, to bring closer to popular simplicity the devotion to the infancy as conceived by Brother Francis of the Child Jesus.

From the first months of her novitiate, in fact, Margaret saw herself chosen by Jesus to honor His infancy and His crib. She confided as much to the novice mistress, Mary of the Trinity, of Quatrebarbes: «The holy Child Jesus,» she said, «keeps me constantly intent on the moment of His holy birth, and He has made me concentrate on the first twelve years of His infancy in such a way that He has given them to me wall and an outwork beyond which He does not permit me to venture.» This mission, therefore, will be the grand, unique occupation of Margaret's life; and her entire existence will be a continuous dialogue with the Child Jesus, a total adhesion to His state.

Margaret's prayer was incessant, silent and meditative. She remained united to Him Who had completely separated her from the things of earth in order to seize her for Himself. It was He Who had destined her to experience, not one of those sorrowful states that purify the soul and transform it, as is the case with so many other saints, but one of those joyful states that adorn the soul with the rarest of virtues and add to the charm of purity and simplicity the graces of the divine infancy.

It was the privilege of the venerable to reproduce within herself, interiorly as well as exteriorly, this state of the Child Jesus. Frequently consoled by special illuminations on the state of God as a child at Bethlehem, she carried about «the impression of His holy and divine infancy.» For a long time she manifested exteriorly «a participation in the state of the Child Jesus in the crib,» even remaining «lying on the floor for many days without being able to rise, and from time to time emitting a little infant's cry. Her appearance and all the movements of her face were changed and became altogether like those of a new-born child...» During this period she received ineffable insights and knowledge about the state of the Child Jesus in the manger:.. His littleness, His divine weaknesses and His abasement...: (Ms. n. 9, f. 255, of the Carmel of Beaune, a text partially cited by Deberre, *Histoire de la Venerable Marguerite*, pp. 108-9).

For many years these divine favors remained Within the ambit of the community of Beaune, but after 1638 great changes took place. The Child Jesus called Margaret to

work actively for the salvation of souls; He revealed to her that in His divine infancy she was to find the means of obtaining the mercy of the Father. At the same time He taught her the way of honoring His holy infancy from the moment of His incarnation until his twelfth year. The Child Jesus wanted the project that He communicated to her to have as its title: «the family of the Child Jesus.» Following these directives, Margaret, beginning on March 24, 1636; brought together the «household and associates of the Child Jesus.» The associates were to celebrate the twenty-fifth day of every month in memory of the Annunciation and of the Nativity, every day to recite the abbreviated rosary, called «the rosary, of the Holy Child», and to meditate, week after week, on «all the actions, words and mysteries» of the Child Jesus. But the fundamental obligation which they assumed when they inscribed themselves in the association was that of following the states of the Incarnate Word «in a holy union of heart and of spirit,» since the best way of «honoring the simplicity and the kindness of the holy Child Jesus is that of constantly practicing a most perfect simplicity, kindness, pleasantness and deep humility» (Manual of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Infancy of Jesus, established in the monastery of the Carmelite nuns of Beaune, in Deberre, Histoire, pp. 385-421, and ms. n. 23, ff. 1-5 of the Carmel of Beaune). In other words, it was necessary for the associates to submit themselves to the divine will with the candor of infancy.

Circumstances were to favor a rapid diffusion of the association, which the Holy See was very soon to erect into a confraternity that is still flourishing. France was then in a very serious crisis, her frontiers were menaced on all sides, the future of the dynasty was uncertain. The royal family and the masses sought for help from all the praying communities. It was the moment at which, through the initiative of the Calvarine Anne de Goulaine, the consecration of France to the Blessed Virgin was being prepared in accord with the vow of Louis XIII that was reputedly imposed by Richelieu: Hence, as soon as the existence of the association of the holy Child Jesus became known, enrollments multiplied. Anne of Austria confided her worries to the venerable; for twenty years she had been praying in vain for the birth of an heir. The restoration of peace and the birth of an heir, which followed one after the other, increased the fame of the humble Carmelite.

During the course of the first world war an analogous phenomenon was to be verified: the confidence placed in St. Therese of the Child Jesus was to create a favorable climate for her glorification. Just as the Saint of Lisieux would protect the soldiers who were entrusted to her, so Margaret defended the interests that were entrusted to her and she became the symbol of the power of devotion to the infancy. Surrounded by veneration, she continued her mission of peace and of union – something that is illustrated with so much eloquence by the statue of the Little King of Grace still preserved at Beaune.

When Margaret died, on May 26, 1648, in an ecstasy of love; devotion to the infancy of Jesus was in its full flower. Associations were being created everywhere to honor the mystery of the crib, most often through the inspiration of the Oratorians, since the school of Berulle was not long in coming under the influence of Beaune. Works

dedicated to the infancy of Jesus multiplied to such an extent that these themes were among those most often treated by spiritual writers of the XVII and even of the XVIII centuries. Any number of names could be cited, but it is sufficient to recall those of Father Barre, Minim; of St. John Eudes, who depends on both Berulle and Margaret; and of St. John Baptist de La Salle, who owes her so much.

The prodigious success of the message of Margaret at Beaune was evidently due to the need of souls avid for humility, renunciation and poverty; but it was also the result of the exceptional virtues of the venerable. During her lifetime she had drawn all the personalities of her epoch to the grate of the Beaune Carmel; after her death, her light was without limits.

The first biography of the servant of God, published in 1655 by Amelotte, made her personal virtues known, above all, her innocence, her purity and her simplicity, but also her extraordinary renunciation. She had, in fact, lived poor and despoiled of everything, «dead to herself and alive to Jesus Christ, according to the light and the graces received at the moment of her profession.» Pilgrimages to her tomb continued; on Nov. 19, 1658, Louis XIV, Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarino came. Right up to the French revolution, which for a certain time put an end to these gatherings of the faithful, the chapel of Carmel saw filing through it all the great and the holy ones of France. For all these reasons, the process of beatification was begun immediately after the death of the servant of God. The highest authorities of the Church and of the kingdom came to bring their testimony; and in the first place was the pious queen, Anne of Austria. The canonical inquiry was almost completely concluded, and the bishop of Autun, Louis Dony d'Attichy, ordinary of the place (the diocese of Dijon had not yet been erected), was preparing to present the complete and quite voluminous documentation to Rome, when death overtook him in 1664.

Since the bishop was a member of the Order of Minims, he had entrusted to the Minims of Beaune his remains and his library. Among the manuscripts of the library was the documentation of Margaret's process. The Carmelite nuns used «great diligence and many attempts» to recover it; but the difficulties they met with in this matter were many and of long duration, so that in 1789 they had still not been resolved. In the same year the French revolution broke out and the documents of the process seemed definitively lost

They were found only in 1850; and immediately the bishop of Dijon, Msgr. Francis Victor Rivet, took the necessary steps to conclude the cause successfully.

On Oct. 29, 1865, the canonical inquiry, interrupted for over two hundred years, was reopened. In 1868 the documentation was sent on to the Congregation of Rites. On June 19, 1873, Pope Pius IX, at the request of Cardinal Pitra, supporter of the cause, signed the decree of introduction; and on Dec. 10, 1880, there took place, in the monastery of the Carmelite nuns at Beaune, the recognition of Margaret's remains. The ante-preparatory congregation regarding Margaret's virtues took place on April 5, 1889; this was followed by two preparatory sessions, on Feb. 4, 1902, and on Aug. 23, 1904. New

objections by the promoters of the faith, J. B. Lugari and then A. Verde — both future cardinals — had demanded this duplication of procedure inasmuch as some visions of the venerable were questioned. A general session was held on June 9, 1905; and finally, on Dec. 10 following, the decree certifying the heroicity of the virtues of the servant of God was promulgated in the presence of Pope Pius X.

After that date, the cause of the venerable has not progressed. However, her influence on souls does not cease to increase; and all the studies on modern and contemporary spirituality have shown the place that the humble nun of Burgundy occupies in the Church.

It is clear that if St. Therese of the Child Jesus has permitted today's world to taste fully the doctrine of spiritual infancy and of total abandonment, it is necessary to return to the spirituality of Margaret in order to find the point of departure for this extraordinary movement. The virgin of Lisieux has given to the doctrine of spiritual infancy a form that future centuries should not modify, because it constitutes a point of arrival. The virgin of Beaune, on the other hand, was an initiator: she opened the way, and showed souls that holiness is accessible to all, provided that they imitate the infancy of Jesus. Both Carmelites, each in her own way, are united in the fulfillment of one mission.

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