

St. Mary Magdalene De' Pazzi

Carmelite mystic; b. Florence, April 2, 1566; d. there, May 25, 1607 (feast, May 29; among the Carmelites, May 25). She was born of a noble family, the daughter of Camillo de' Pazzi and Maria di Lorenzo Buondelmonti, and was given the name Catherine at her Baptism. Precociously pious, she learned to meditate at the age of 9 from the family confessor, the Jesuit Andrea Rossi. She was less than 10 when she made her first Communion, 1 month after which she made a vow of virginity. She attended school, first as a day student (1574-78) and then as a boarder (1580-81), at the monastery of S. Giovanni dei Cavalieri, where, with the help of the sisters and the nearby Jesuits, she completed the solid spiritual formation begun in the family and revealed her desire to become a nun.

The Carmelite convent in Florence, S. Maria degli Angeli (founded 1474), attracted her because of its privilege of daily Holy Communion. In August 1582 she sought admission and spent the customary 10-day probationary period in the convent. On December 1, she was received as a postulant, taking the name Mary Magdalene, and the following Jan. 30, 1583, she entered the novitiate. A year later she became critically ill, and in spite of the best medical treatment she seemed at the point of death. On Trinity Sunday, May 27, 1594, her superiors allowed her to make her profession *in articulo* in a private ceremony on a cot in the chapel. It marked the beginning of extraordinary ecstatic experiences whose number, intensity, and variety were to gain her the title of the Ecstatic Saint.

Immediately after the profession she fell into an ecstasy that lasted about 2 hours and was repeated after Holy Communion on the following 40 mornings. These ecstasies were rich experiences of union with God and

marvelous insights into divine truths. Visions and locutions, as well as the symbolic mystical graces, such as the exchange of hearts or the invisible stigmata, abounded within them. Similar transports but without the insensibility of ecstasy, "excesses of love," in which she talked and moved about, likewise began to occur. As a safeguard against deception and to preserve the revelations, the convent confessor, Agostino Campi, directed her to dictate her experiences to sister secretaries, who would also write down what they observed. This is the origin of the works of Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi. Over the next 6 years five large volumes were filled. The books were properly attested by witnesses and approved by ecclesiastical authorities and theologians. They are preserved in the archives of the convent now called the convent of S. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi in Florence.

Book 1, called *The Forty Days*, covers the first period from May 27 to July 26, 1584, and includes intermittent ecstasies until August 15. Book 2, *The Colloquies*, records experiences between Christmas 1584 and the following July 4, 1585. However, Pentecost week, June 8 to June 16, 1585, is recorded separately in book 3, *Revelations and Intelligences*. This week was a preparation for a severe, 5-year trial that began on Trinity Sunday. Book 4, *The Probation*, records this trial, which lasted until 1590. After this time ecstasies were less frequent. The majority occurred in the 2-year period from 1584 to 1586. The final volume, book 5, *The Renovation of the Church*, recounts only one ecstasy but includes 12 letters concerning reform and renewal that were dictated in July and August 1586 and were directed to important personages in the Church (and apparently never delivered to them).

One other literary work remains, the so-called *Admonitions* (MS title: *Ammaestramenti, avvisii, e ricordi della Madre Beata Maria Maddalena*, Arch. Monast., Pal IV, N. 57 and 65; pub. as *Avvertimenti et avvisi ...*, 1669). This is a collection of her sayings and owes its existence to the pedagogical roles she fulfilled in the convent. Beginning in 1589 she was either assistant novice mistress or instructor of the young; in 1598 she became novice mistress, and in 1604, subprioress. Although her vocation was a contemplative one of love and suffering for the Church, her own capable novice mistress and prioress throughout her convent life, Mother Evangelista del Giocondo, saw to it that Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi collaborated in the formation of the young. Her disciples showed their appreciation by collecting the lessons they learned and preserving them as a last testament. She died at the age of 41, was beatified by Urban IV on May 8, 1626, and

was canonized by Clement IX on April 28, 1669.

Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi has been a popular saint, especially in her native Italy. Two contemporary biographies, those of V. Puccini and V. Ceparì, SJ, and the publication of her writings (however uncritical and truncated the published editions to date have been) have given rise to an abundant devotional literature concerned with her. But until the mid-20th century there were but few scientific studies of her life or her spiritual doctrine. The publication in the 1960's of the original texts of her works (see bibliog.) should lead to better studies of her life and work. The style of the writings is a hindrance: it is baroque, pedantic, excessively allegorical, and repetitious. But this poor vehicle conveys a rich doctrinal spirituality that is Trinitarian, Christological, and especially Eucharistic. Her teaching is preeminently liturgical and ecclesial.

Bibliography: *Tutte le opere di Santa Maria Maddalena de' Fazzi dai manoscritti originali*, ed. F. Nardoni (Florence 1960-). 1 v. pub. yearly; 7 v. when complete in 1966, F. Baertius and C. Janningus, ActSS May 6 (1866) 175-348. Ermanno Del Ssmo. Sacramento, "I manoscritti originali di S. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi," *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 7 (1956) 323-400. M. Minima, *Seraph among Angels: The Life of St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi*, ed. and tr. G. W. Pausback (Chicago 1958). S. Thor-Salviant, *Secrets of a Seraph: The Spiritual Doctrine of St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi*, ed. and tr. G. W. Pausback (Downers Grove, IL 1961).