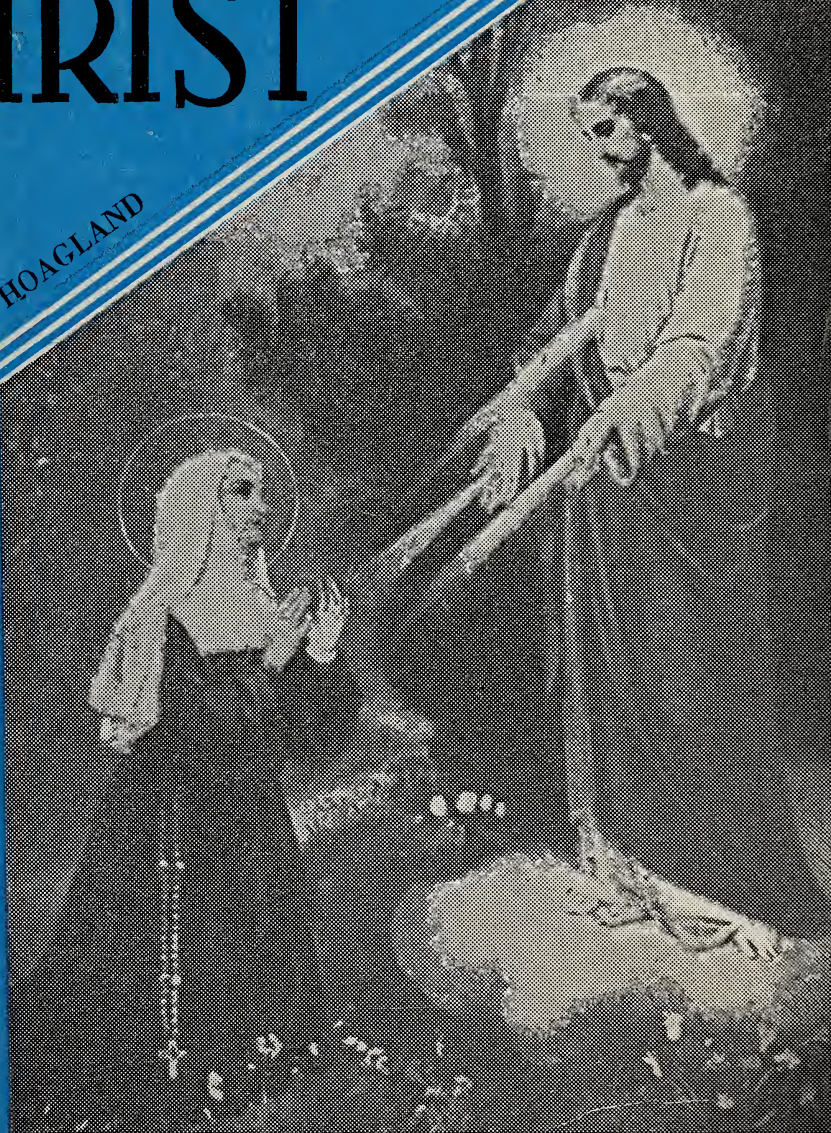


SHE TALKED WITH CHRIST

By M. HOAGLAND

A NEW
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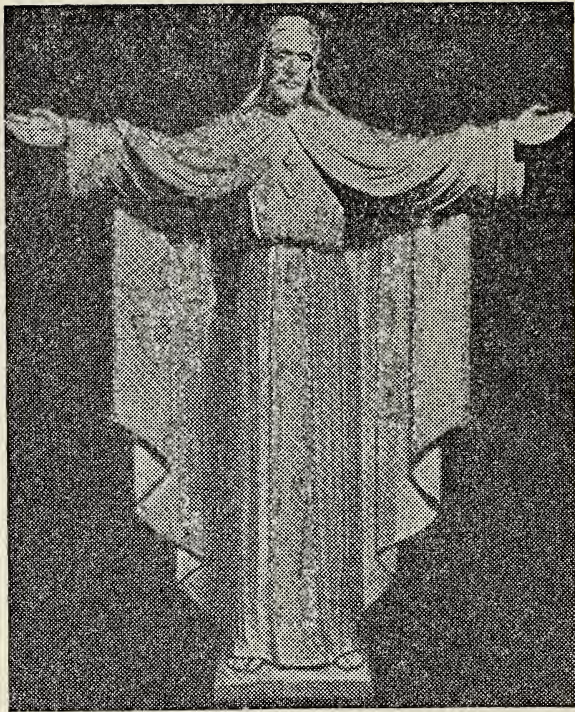


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Come to Me

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She Talked With Christ

A NEW STUDY OF

St. Margaret-Mary Alacoque

By

MARJORIE HOAGLAND



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DEDICATED TO MY BELOVED AUNT WHO REARED ME,

MISS LUCY JANE HOAGLAND

WHO WALKED WITH GOD IN LIFE, AND FOR WHOM

ETERNITY BEGAN JULY 7, 1954

Table Of Contents

	PAGE
FORWARD	9
CHAPTER I: Thus Hard Came Glory	11
CHAPTER II: The Revelations	20
CHAPTER III: The Promises	24
CHAPTER IV: Margaret-Mary Teaches Her Novices — and the World	28
CHAPTER V: The Feast of the Sacred Heart	42
CHAPTER VI: "Thy End is Thy Beginning" — The Great Retreat..	44

FOREWORD

“...that we may return God love for love...”

That was the great appeal of St. Margaret-Mary Alacoque, the humble little Visitation nun of the 17th century whose Revelations became the later foundation of the vast Sacred Heart devotion.

St. Margaret-Mary, who lived her life out in the village of Paray-le-Monial, France, died at 42 utterly worn out by the fury — the magnificent fury — of her devotion to Christ. Her life was stark in its outlines, for after she became a nun it had in it only one thing: her overwhelming love for her Lord. Humanly speaking, she died a failure... a failure, and yet under God the one person most important in bringing the vast and brilliant Catholic Counter-Reformation to the “heart-level” of the rank and file of people the world over. The great of the Church had spoken in the Counter-Reformation; the wise (then and now) have heeded their words. But in this world not many of us are superlatively wise, and St. Margaret-Mary spoke to the simple and the unlearned, and the wise who had learned to become child-like, and she said one thing: “See how Christ loves you! Love Him back!” Humble in most things, in nine tenths of the routine of her life, she was not pedestrian in the one thing that counted: love of God. There she was a classicist, there she was a Saint.

She advanced with Divine authority the Promises attached to the Sacred Heart devotion. How warm and wonderful these Promises are as we are assured grace sufficient for our state in life, and that we shall not die in His disgrace. Yet above all things she did not intend that we should regard this as a Celestial Passport for sale, nor that “making the Nine Fridays” ever should become merely a safety precaution for the hereafter. To avoid such pitfalls, perhaps we might study together a while the origin and the implications of the Revelations.

CHAPTER I

THUS HARD CAME GLORY

Speaking of St. Margaret-Mary, a nun at Paray-le-Monial in our own times has explained her being a member of the Visitation Order by saying that if anyone has a beautiful pearl, a most extraordinary pearl, a pearl of great price, he is wise to choose an utterly simple setting that lets the beauty of the pearl shine forth the more greatly by contrast. (See the *Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque* written by a Paray nun, and available in English from this address: Visitation Library, Roselands, Walmer, England).

St. Margaret-Mary was led by God in most extraordinary ways, yet humanly she was an "average" person and the Order to which she belonged was one that stressed not the uncommon but the *common*, the steady observance of the Rule, the simple performance of ordinary duties.

Thus her actions in setting forth the great Revelations showed forth the more surely. They came from Christ; they were outside anything she would have thought of personally, or that her Order would accept readily. Think of this a moment. Suppose she had been of unusual personal brilliance, and — for instance — a Carmelite formed in the tradition of the far-reaching reforms instituted by St. Teresa of Avila. Against such a background, would the startling import of the Revelations have appeared so readily?

She was an *ordinary* person with an *extraordinary* task in the high performance of which she literally gave her life.

The Alacoque family had been one of wealth and tradition, but after Margaret-Mary's father died, their property got into the hands of certain "in-laws" who made up in nerve whatever they lacked in brains, and who eventually made the Alacoque women servants in their own home. They had to work like dogs serving a group of uncouth louts, and they lacked clothing, food, and medical care. The townspeople—most of whom had been treated most generously by the family in days gone by—were horrified and sympathetic, but powerless to help except very secretly. The in-laws, having very guilty consciences, were frightened whenever the situation came to public attention, and retaliated against the two women whenever a well-meaning bystander tried to help them. Eventually, the Alacoque sons came of age and ousted the in-laws; once more, the ladies Alacoque came into their own. Unhappily, Margaret-Mary's mother never fully recovered from the experience, and thus began her tremendous pressure upon Margaret-Mary to make a good and secure marriage. Under the circumstances it is understandable enough, but the mother did not hesitate to use the appeal to Margaret-Mary that the girl *owed* it to her to secure their mutual future. This the girl found it hard to resist, though she early had determined to become a nun.

A vividly alive and attractive young woman, with a face of almost classic proportions and a heart of warmth and sensitivity, she did in fact have several excellent opportunities for marriage. At one time she even consented to become engaged, but the overwhelming power of her love for Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and her strong sense of vocation prevailed. She broke the engagement. Then the family wanted her to enter a convent nearby, where their influence perhaps might be of benefit. She chose the Visitation Order instead, at Paray, far from home...always thereafter her "dear Paray." Reluctantly and under pressure, her family finally consented and arranged for her dowry.

None of this was easy for Margaret-Mary. She adored her brothers all her life through, and for her mother she had a tremendous tenderness. She could not explain—since she did not know—why it was so overwhelmingly important that she act precisely as she did. She only knew that she could not do otherwise.

Due to her prolonged family resistance to her vocation, Margaret-Mary was in her early twenties when she entered the Visitation. The grief she had felt over the conflict with her mother particularly, and also with her brothers, had left its mark upon her — yet she was radiant with joy as she stepped into the parlor at Paray to begin the work for which God had destined her. To casual onlookers, she seemed almost too happy. Intense grief and bewilderment, and a stupendous joy — henceforth, these were to be the pattern characterizing her life.

For at Paray—the Paray whose proudest boast now is that it is her shrine, famous and beloved the world over wherever the Sacred Heart is known—her path never was smooth, and often it was intolerably rough.

From the outset, the paths in which she was led caused her to be in difficulties with her Superiors and with her sister nuns.

It should be said that being the Superior of a Saint is no small task. When a Religious is led in extraordinary ways, the Superior has to decide 1) whether any element of deliberate error or attempt to mislead others may exist, or 2) whether the subject herself may be deluded and if so, how to deal with the situation, or 3) if the vocation is true but unusual — as was actually the case with St. Margaret-Mary — how to establish that beyond all doubt, how to lead the subject best, and how to avoid unnecessary confusion to others who may be more ordinary, but perhaps equally well-intentioned. Superiors are chosen for their prudence and their capacity to lead average persons, since after all saints cannot be too much anticipated. Saints usually are controversial while they live; it is only later, with hindsight, that they are seen in true perspective.

When all of this is said, it still remains true that St. Margaret-Mary seems to have been unusually "beset" with Superiors.

It is an unfortunate fact in any age, most people—nine tenths of them perhaps—feel like just plain fools when they run up against an *utterly* sincere person. The sincerity itself rebukes them, makes their shabbiness and lack of wholeness and their pride in their pretenses all too obvious. Perhaps at times some nuns, and Superiors too, have not been entirely immune to this.

Then, too, Margaret-Mary was simple; humanly and socially speaking, she may have been the least of the Paray nuns. She had little training in Religion. Some of the others came from families of immense wealth and power in France, and they felt they had their religion well in hand. (They possessed *it*; *it* did not possess *them*). And here was this disturbing, sincere, country girl, quoting Christ first-hand, and having day-to-day conversations with Him! Under obedience, she'd tell her Superiors, and the Superiors seem to have let it get around. And she was always adopting stringent methods with herself. It wasn't to be borne by the Visitation. *Why* couldn't she go somewhere else. . . *anywhere* else?

When the community made its first retreat after she entered, Margaret-Mary was not permitted full participation; what she needed, it was decided, was calming down. So she was kept engaged in kitchen work and also sent to keep some animals from trampling the garden. Now, the animals hitherto had been tied up, but they were loosed — just to keep Margaret-Mary occupied. . . And after long hours, she could sometimes be seen pressed longingly against the building housing the Blessed Sacrament, love in every line of her lithe body. When the time came for Profession, by common consent her Profession was delayed, and then delayed yet again.

Finally came the day when Margaret-Mary appeared unexpectedly in the Superior's office to say that Christ Himself would be responsible for her conduct as a professed nun, and that He wanted her entrance delayed no longer. Quailed by such author-

itative words from one usually so amenable, the Superior finally gave her consent. Thus belatedly, and thus reluctantly, was the greatest of the Visitation nuns admitted to the Order.

* * *

Henceforth, Margaret-Mary must be viewed in two aspects:

a) As a sensitive woman with a warm, friendly, and loyal heart, ever aware of her own faults and strongly disinclined to do anything to attract attention to herself. She was intelligent and responsive and sweet. This was Margaret-Mary the woman.

b) Then there is Margaret-Mary the Saint, chosen by Christ to convey to the world a new message of His tremendous, His overwhelming love for mankind and His longing for love in return. Here she was indeed St. Margaret-Mary, the called and the chosen. Here she had destiny and a high spiritual privilege she did not seek, but for which she was willing to lay down her life. Christ told her what to say and do; she said and did it—it was as simple, and and as mighty, as that. She walked in the Paray garden and was not alone, for Christ walked with her; she shared His passion as He cried out, "Behold this Heart—" And as bearer of Christ's fresh appeal for love, St. Maragaret-Mary was misunderstood, taunted, ridiculed, threatened, reviled, and betrayed. No friendly hand was held out to her; nothing mitigated her pain and bewilderment, nor did anyone smooth her path, except one great director, Rev. (now Blessed) Claude de la Columbiere.

It made the conflict between Margaret-Mary the woman, and the Saint of the Revelations, well-nigh unbearable. Her simplest word was decried and turned against her, not least by her Superiors. She herself finally was driven to believing herself "a sink of contradiction" to everyone, including herself, and she prayed earnestly that all memory of her would be erased so that it would not impair devotion to the Sacred Heart. Then, she thought, her personality would not interfere with acceptance of the great Rev-

elations. Yet there never was anything wrong with her personality, *except that she was a personality charged with a most unusual mission.* She spoke for Christ, who ended His mission on a Cross high on a hill over Jerusalem, between two thieves.

And a servant is not above his Lord.

... A humble little Visitation nun who lived only 42 years in all, dying in 1690 in a village called Paray-le-Monial in France... a faithful execution on her part of Christ's commands, though humanly she took a terrific "beating" because of it... and then the Church was so immeasurably enriched that we find it hard to believe the full Sacred Heart devotion was not always a part of it... Thus does God use the least to achieve the greatest — thus does He show a-new His evaluations — and thus does His glory outshine the stars and His power endure forever.

* * *

From the Revelations to St. Margaret-Mary came these things in their richest development:

- 1) Devotion to the Sacred Heart.
- 2) The keeping of the Nine First Fridays for Communions of reparation to our Lord — and the Promises, so awe-inspiring in scope and generosity, to those who comply.
- 3) The institution of the Holy Hour on Thursdays, which can be observed publicly or privately in homes the world over.
- 4) A Feast of the Sacred Heart, observed by the entire Church on the Friday immediately following the Feast of Corpus Christi.

St. Margaret-Mary's immediate problem at Paray was that every word she spoke, every step she took, further aroused the distrust and exasperation felt in regard to her. She was considered visionary, stubborn, misled, and even weak-minded. Her Superiors (who usually had 6 year terms of office), far from upholding her, only added fuel to the flame. Christ would speak to her in the

tenderest terms, and tell her to convey certain things to the Superior or to other nuns. When she obeyed, the "dressing down" she got must have withered the crops for miles around.

St. Margaret-Mary — being a Saint, though an unrecognized one — always felt it must somehow be entirely her fault, and thanked God that she was allowed to suffer for His sake. Thus can saints redeem error, though that is not to imply that the error should have existed in the first place. In fact, Christ Himself became tired of the resistance to Him of certain of the nuns, but typically St. Margaret-Mary offered herself and her suffering in reparation for her persecutors — and His wrath was turned away.

Since she was a nun and cloistered, Christ sent the brilliant Rev. Claude de la Columbiere, a Jesuit, to help her. Her relationship with him was a great one, though brief because of his early death. It ranks with that of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross — St. Francis and St. Clare — St. Frances de Sales and St. Jane de la Chantel: saints united as working "teams" to perform God's tasks. Yet even here, there was a cross for Margaret-Mary, because when her solid virtue and exceptional mission was revealed to him and he espoused her cause, he himself came in for some of the general fury and it was claimed that she had "deceived" him too. (As she put it, she had dragged him into her own "wretched orbit").

He not merely rode out the storm, but he was able to smooth her path with at least two Superiors, to one of whom he used the sternest words he ever had spoken in his life. His real task, however, was putting her Revelations into written form, published as part of Retreat addresses after his death. Later, two other great Jesuits rendered almost equally pioneering service.

There were two "high points" in the persecution of the Saint.

One was when she was required to make a statement to the community that she had offered herself in reparation for five nuns — who needed it. That night was likened by St. Margaret-Mary as like unto a crucifixion, as she was literally dragged from one part of the house to another all night long as the enraged nuns tried to

force a more detailed statement from her. She refused to amplify, though she had the facts to do so; even so, the few words she spoke were turned against her and distorted. The lax nuns either had to recognize their own failings, or they had to follow the easy course of discrediting Margaret-Mary; they followed the latter. It reached the point that when she walked by them, they threw holy water on her to protect themselves from the "devil" who had "ensnared" her. But Christ walked now always by her side, she felt, and told her that He loved holy water. Eventually, she was driven into almost complete physical collapse, and not one hand was extended to her in sympathy and understanding.

The other was when, as novice mistress, she objected to the reception of a young girl who had no vocation but was being forced into the convent by her wealthy parents. Since the girl was related by blood to most of the "principal" families of the province, the situation was allowed to become a public scandal with the towns-people joining in the general hue and cry. There were even threats of prison for the Saint. By then, she said she was "annihilated" in reputation and esteem and that there was nothing left for her to suffer.

With apostolic zeal, she had introduced the Sacred Heart devotion into the novitiate, but this too aroused condemnation. She herself was at one time refused permission to receive communion on the First Fridays for a period of many months, until Christ rectified the situation.

Yet she tenderly and tirelessly promoted the Sacred Heart devotion in the few ways open to her, mainly by letters, and almost at the end of her life its worth began to be recognized. Then indeed she was ready to end her sojourn here.

* * *

... October 17, 1690, St. Margaret-Mary died. . . And once her gentle heart beat no more, her quiet voice was stilled and her hands

busy no more in their vast task, there began a general re-evaluation of her life and words, and deep was the repentance many of her persecutors experienced. And since they had a Saint in heaven to plead for them, one cannot doubt that their cries for mercy were heard.

As she had predicted, the Jesuits assumed special responsibility for the development of the Sacred Heart devotion, but there long was much public opposition to it. The cold Jansenists raged, and the "anti-Church" folk derided and used the hot words of little men. But as was predestined, the Sacred Heart devotion triumphed, and has been led by the Society of Jesus with superb wisdom and vision.

May 31, 1920, Margaret-Mary Alacoque was canonized under Pope Benedict XV. Now officially she was recognized as what she long had been, *Saint* Margaret-Mary, powerful advocate with the Sacred Heart for all mankind.

Thus hard came glory.

CHAPTER II

THE REVELATIONS

When the Church canonizes a saint, it testifies to or authenticates officially his or her *heroic sanctity and miracle-working power*, and further indicates that *there is nothing contrary to Doctrine in the known writings or claims of the person canonized*. This does not mean that the Church has passed on the validity of every word that fell from the saint's lips: the Church stands on the prudent statement that there is nothing against Church dogma or traditions in those words.

However, since the Church authorized the Feast of the Sacred Heart set forth in the Revelations to St. Margaret-Mary (and also fostered the Holy Hour), this would seem to set a further seal upon these Revelations. Then too, the richness of the indulgences attached to true devotion to the Sacred Heart would seem to indicate something beyond the ordinary there.

June, 1675 there took place the primary Revelation, beginning with the famous words from Christ: "Behold this Heart, Which has loved men so much that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify to them Its love; and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude. . ." Then Our Lord continued with the request for a Feast of the Sacred Heart to be held the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, to make reparation for the disregard shown It while exposed upon the altars of the world.

This launched a new era in Christ's Church, and Popes and people have joined in hailing it by their words and by their acts.

There were many conversations between Christ and St. Margaret-Mary leading up this signal Revelation; nor can it be claimed that she was given high visions without adversity. Once Christ gave her a glimpse of what the remainder of her life on earth would be like, and she said she "shook with horror" — as well she might, for as we have seen it entailed both mental, emotional, and physical sufferings in unusual degree. Her own unworthiness overwhelmed her; her ardent love for Christ and her wish to console Him for the things He suffered at the hands of others was as a burning flame to her; above all, she seemed balked at every turn as she tried to bring to others the new knowledge and experience that had come to her.

Our Lady seems to have been especially near her when the interchange between Diety and humanity became almost too much for her to bear. Near her, too, were the angels, whom (in her gentle way) she always called her "Divine Associates." It was a title she hit upon because they said they would form an association with her to aid those in need and perpetually to love and honor the Blessed Sacrament. (At Paray-le-Monial, the little court where this apparition took place is known as The Court of the Blessed Sacrament; the steps upon which she was kneeling still are in good presentation, and may be seen by pilgrims to the shrine).

Knowledge of the urgency of First Friday communions of reparation, and of Holy Hours on Thursday, had come thus:

"The Sacred Heart was represented to me as a resplendent sun, the burning rays of which fell vertically upon my heart, which was inflamed with a fire so vivid that it seemed as if it would reduce me to ashes. It was at these times especially that my Divine Master taught me what he required of me. . . Jesus Christ presented Himself to me all resplendent with glory, His five wounds shining like so many suns. Flames issued from every part of His Sacred Body especially from—His Heart, the living source of these flames. It

was then that He (showed me) the ineffable marvels of His pure love, and to what an excess He loved men, from whom in return He received only ingratitude and contempt. 'I feel this more,' He said, 'than all I suffered in My Passion. If they would make Me some return for My love, I should think but little of all I have done for them, and should wish, were it possible, to suffer still more. But they entertain only coldness towards Me, and the sole return they make for all My eagerness to do them good, is to reject and treat Me with coldness. Do thou at least console Me as far as thou art able.' On my representing to Him my inability, 'This,' He replied, 'will enable thee to supply for all deficiencies.' And at the same time, His Divine Heart being opened, there issued from It a flame so intense that I thought I should have been consumed, for I was wholly penetrated with it, and being no longer able to bear it, I besought Him to have pity on my weakness. 'I will be thy strength,' He said to me; 'fear not, and be attentive to My voice. . . Thou shalt . . . communicate on the First Friday of each month. Every night between Thursday and Friday, I will make thee share in the overwhelming sadness which I was pleased to feel in the Garden of Olives; and this sadness shall reduce thee to an agony harder to endure than death itself. . . Remain prostrate with Me for an hour, not only to appease the divine anger by begging mercy for sinners, but also to mitigate in some way the bitterness which I felt at that time. . .'

Deity, pleading with humanity for love; and, offering Himself to make up for the deficiencies shown in our love. The Man of Galilee, the Christ of the Cross, reaching from heaven in His tempestuous love for mankind, His love which indeed seems a sublime love unto folly. Because the Sacrament of Love is such a deeply caring thing, such a love-charged, Deity-charged thing, our First Friday communions of reparation never can descend to rote or the "adding machine" category: they are, even for the humblest of us, events of world-shaking import, or they are nothing. Love cannot be dealt with lightly.

The Feast of Sacred Heart, the Nine First Fridays of communions of reparation, the Holy Hours on Thursdays — knowledge of Christ's wish for these manifestations, so sacred and yet so simple, came to St. Margaret-Mary in special Revelations. And though she long had been prepared by God to receive the Revelations, even so they were paid for at terrific human cost *just because she did love her Redeemer so much*. Christ asked for love: she gave the length and breadth and depth of her heart. He asked for the Holy Hour: to the end of her days, she spent Thursday nights (from 11 p.m. till 12 midnight) stretched on the floor of her bare cell in an agony of love and prayer. He asked for communions of reparation to the Sacred Heart: the worst sorrow she could suffer was when she was prevented from complying. He asked for prayer for sinners: she whole-heartedly offered herself for them, as individuals (such as the Paray nuns who had caused His displeasure) and by the hundreds and by the thousands. . . she could not bear that those for whom Christ had died should fail to be truly His. The souls in purgatory pleaded for her intercession: their torments became hers until they were released.

Christ once told her, she said, that the prayers of one just person availed for many. She was not a person to take this responsibility and this opportunity lightly.

Thus each Revelation brought *new responsibility*, and a *vast newly-realized potential*. It was so with the Saint; if we would emulate her example, it cannot be less so with us. With knowledge comes obligation. But no obligation ever was more rewarding than a maturing love of the Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER III

THE PROMISES

The powerful promises of Our Lord to St. Margaret-Mary for souls devoted to the Sacred Heart are stated in brief and very clear form in literature distributed by the Apostleship of Prayer, 515 East Fordham Road, New York 58, New York. The Apostleship has made available at trifling cost a plastic card, listing the promises on one side, and on the other reproducing a most pleasing painting showing Our Lord letting the rays of His Sacred Heart fall upon the kneeling St. Margaret-Mary. It is the kind of thing any lover of the Sacred Heart will value all his life through.

The promises as given officially by the Apostleship are as follows:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their homes.
3. I will comfort them in all their afflictions.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all in death.
5. I will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source and the infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.
9. I will bless every place in which an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.

11. Those who shall promote this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.
12. I promise thee in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on the First Friday in nine consecutive months the grace of final penitence; they shall not die in my disgrace nor without receiving their Sacraments. My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.

* * *

These promises are tremendous, awe-inspiring; and, they are worth endless pondering. The Church infallibly guarantees as true only what she herself teaches in matters of faith and morals. These truths are called Public Revelation. *However, by its searching examination of the Revelations of St. Margaret-Mary (containing the promises) at the time she was proposed for beatification, and its later canonization of Margaret-Mary, the Church showed that it found nothing in the private Revelations to her contrary to orthodox doctrine or Christian standards of goodness.* Thus, as Rev. William Lawson, S.J., says: "They can therefore be accepted as sound in themselves: and the Saint can be trusted as prudent and truthful." He then emphasizes that *in practice, there is a further approval of the Revelations in the fact that the Church not merely allows but actively encourages devotions springing from them, such as the Devotion of the Nine First Fridays.*

The promises — each of them, all of them — have a *simple immensity* about them. Who but Christ ever said such great things so clearly, so easily, so unpretentiously? Who ever spoke as He did? Go back 2,000 years, and the ring of the words is the same. . .

. . . I will comfort them in all their afflictions. . . I will be their secure refuge during life and above all in death. . . I will bestow abundant blessings . . . Sinners shall find in My Heart the source and the infinite ocean of mercy. . . A young Man who did only good but, at the age of 33, was put to death as a common criminal pleading even from the Cross for His persecutors — this young

Man spoke so, long ago. With confidence, with power, with compassion.

The 9th promise concerns blessings upon every place where an image of the Sacred Heart is exposed and honored. In practice this can be a statue, a painting, a photograph of a painting. The photograph reproduced in this pamphlet is of a quite famous statue on exhibition at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Fifth Avenue and 91st St., New York City, by the noted Boston sculptor Brunner. The Badge of the Sacred Heart may be obtained through the League in your parish. Sacred Heart medals, showing the Sacred Heart on one side and St. Margaret-Mary on the other, are available as follows: Superior, Visitation Monastery, Paray-le-Monial, France. The Paray house also has much other art work and devotional materials, and especially to be valued are the third class relics obtainable there. Sepia in tone, they carry a photo of an authentic portrait of the Saint and a facsimile of her handwriting, and — authenticated by the seal of the Visitation at Paray — silk that has touched her bones. The Paray-le-Monial nuns are wonderfully generous, and it takes only a 15 cent airmail letter to them to bring a quick reply; they are most anxious to promote the devotion in America.

* * *

The 12th promise usually is called “the *great* promise.”

The great promise, that says to lovers of the Sacred Heart that if they commune on the Nine First Fridays they shall have grace of final penitence . . . and, they shall *not* die in Christ’s disgrace, nor without the sacraments! It is the culminating promise, the crowning one.

What greater promise could we be given than word that we shall not die in Christ’s disgrace? Yet it is posited upon certain conditions: through the Nine First Fridays of reparation, we must make a serious and effective attempt at union with Him in the

Sacrament — the Sacrament of love. As we receive Him in the Sacrament, we are thereby united to Him, and we begin to be like Him. Made in good faith, and continued through increasing love of the Sacred Heart, we can have a moral certainty that we shall indeed have “the grace of final penitence.” It presupposes a devotedness on our part — a desire not merely to fulfill the conditions of the 12th promise, but of so loving Our Blessed Lord that we shall enter the hereafter grandly. (After all, eternal life with God, heaven, is a stupendous gift from Him and the opportunity is something that should call out the greatness in us; it isn't something we should, like misers, try to win on “points.” Our Lord died for us, and still — still — loves us infinitely, loving Him and serving Him should afford us joy unspeakable and full of glory).

Quoting Father Lawson again: “. . . the literal meaning of the Great Promise is this: all those who receive Holy Communion with the proper dispositions on nine consecutive First Fridays will receive the grace of final perseverance. Those, therefore, who properly fulfill the conditions are morally certain of their salvation.”

Almost as a footnote, it might be pointed out that Our Lord does not say that all who make the Nine Fridays will receive all the Last Sacraments just before they die, but instead, that each will receive such Sacraments as are necessary to die in God's favor.

And long before St. Margaret-Mary and the enriching Revelations, we had a “forecast” of them from Mother Julian of Norwich, who lived in the fourteenth century. She said she long sought the meaning of Christ's Passion, and finally came the understanding: “*Love was His meaning.*”

CHAPTER IV

ST. MARGARET-MARY TEACHES HER NOVICES — AND THE WORLD

It was customary in seventeenth century France for young girls to spend time at a convent, there to be well-taught and to decide whether or not they had a true vocation. Teaching the young was not a job for which there was fierce competition at Paray, and therefore for several years St. Margaret-Mary was allowed the joy of being Novice Mistress.

It is fortunate for us that this was so. For we owe to her novices much of the finest writings of the Saint, simply because — amid all the crashing blindness regarding Margaret-Mary at Paray — they alone appear to have recognized instinctively who and what she really was. (“... of such is the kingdom of heaven”). Her “little ones” (as Margaret-Mary always called them) were very dear. When, therefore, they were affected with a mass loss of memory, the saintly Novice Mistress seems to have suspected nothing. The children realized she *was* a Saint (nine-tenths of Paray to the contrary) and they wanted her richest thoughts preserved. They formed a little scheme, beautiful in its simplicity. One by one, they told her they urgently wanted to obey her wishes and counsel, but they — being children — might forget them. Would she kindly write down what she said, so they could study it? Thus began the many pages written in the Saint’s own handwriting, stating with brilliant clarity and utter soundness her thoughts on the life hid with Christ in God. The children saved

these pages as she gave them out one by one, and they now are a rich treasure available to the world.

One Church authority, commending her fine writing style despite her lack of technical training in writing, goes on to say, "She formulates spiritual maxims with a precision comparable to that of the best masters. It would be an easy matter to cite examples which recall St. Augustine, St. Teresa, or St. John of the Cross. . . St. Margaret-Mary is incomparable as a mistress of the spiritual life."

And later the same person says of her, "Her words are aflame. Her accents become powerful and take on an irresistible eloquence. To read her slowly for even a few moments is to feel the heart grow warm and the soul lifted above itself. One senses that her words come from a region other than human."

In fact, time and again as she wrote (and remember, Margaret-Mary found it hard to write) there comes into her writings *an authoritative tone*, and one realizes that she is quoting Our Lord Himself. For this was an aspect utterly unlike St. Margaret-Mary on a human basis. Often she states that she is writing to an individual "on His behalf," and then at times she lapses into an outright, "He says —."

What she said "on His behalf" is fully as valid for us today as it was for her novices three centuries ago. She spoke to the fearful — the discouraged — the self-centered or ego-centric — the only partially dedicated — the ones eager to go further in the spiritual life and needing guidance — the tempted — the weary and heavily-burdened. She spoke on abandonment to the will of God on surrender of oneself, on the great desires of the Sacred Heart. She spoke to the novices, and she spoke to the world for all time.

There are 76 pieces of writings in this collection. Fifty are to individual novices; the remaining 26 are made up of what she called "Challenges" to individual novices, and of words addressed to the whole Novitiate. Originally, these writings made up the third part of Volume II of *The Life and Works of Saint Margaret-Mary*

by Monsignor Gauthey, Archbishop of Becancon. Translated from the French at last, they have been published by The Mercier Press, Ltd., Cork. Copies may be obtained in the U.S. by asking your local Catholic book seller to obtain copies from the publisher abroad. The title is, "Religious According to the Sacred Heart."

These writings were meant to be pondered, and long thought about; in fact, once Margaret-Mary herself said (after a matchless piece of spiritual counsel), "I had no intention of saying so much." They never were meant to be read at one sitting; they are for the night table, the train trip, the hard times, and the seeking times all through life. With this fully in mind, here are a few excerpts—no more than that — which may prove useful. . .

* * *

Here is the rich and wonderful advice, applicable by all lovers of the Sacred Heart, to one having a great sense of darkness and suffering:

"I think, my dearest Sister, that it is better for the present to reply to you in writing than personally, as you have abandoned yourself to the power and protection of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. You should melt with love and gratitude for His so-great mercy and tenderness towards you, all of which is even more evident from what you told me in your note. In all that you regard as the rigour of His Justice, I see nothing but marks of His loving kindness towards you. He intends by these means, so little agreeable to nature, to detach you from yourself and all things created. He wishes to render you wholly dependent on grace—expecting all from its assistance, whilst at the same time neglecting nothing in your power to dispose yourself to receive it.

"If you but understood the burning love of Our Lord for you, you would see, indeed, in all that He permits and disposes, only His Pure Love. For the insensibility in which you find yourself is simply to teach you that, to be susceptible to His love and His grace, you must be insensible to all things created, above all to

the suggestions of your own self-love and self-will. He wants you to make as many sacrifices to Him of this latter as He will furnish you with occasions, breaking it and contradicting it until it is entirely destroyed and annihilated so as to allow His Divine Heart to reign in you. Herein lies the source of all your peace, the fullness of which you will be able to enjoy only when you have done what I have indicated, —that is, in so far as it depends on yourself.

“Moreover, the dryness and aridity which beset you are only to teach you that if you want to be a flourishing plant in the Divine garden of the Sacred Heart and there to bear fruits of holiness, you must first of all be dry and barren of every inclination towards vain complacency in, and affection for creatures and yourself, as also all outgrowths of self-love. When the latter presses you to give way either by excusing yourself or otherwise, you must be as one deaf.

“In the third place, the darkness in which God leaves you is to extinguish the false light of human reasoning which hinders in you the accomplishment of His designs and at the same time, draws you aside from the way of perfection. Let yourself be guided by the hand of His good pleasure in the pure light of His Divine Love. To this latter you must abandon yourself entirely, remaining firm and constant, at peace amid all the rigours which it will please Him to make you feel. Be content to remain, whether at prayer or elsewhere, in humble submission to His good pleasure. Hold yourself simply attentive to His loving Presence whilst, at the same time, adhering to all His dispositions in your regard. Don't bother about anything beyond a courageous fidelity to mortifying and humbling yourself well on all occasions, and never commit a voluntary fault.

“Fourthly, this silence which Our Lord maintains towards you by giving you no good thoughts is to teach you to extinguish in yourself all voices which do not speak of love of the Divine Well-Beloved, as for instance, thoughts of self-love and like considerations. Otherwise you will not hear His voice which, by its loving silence, will teach you more than all creatures by their eloquence.

Preserve always, then, an interior silence, speaking little to creatures and much by your works to God—suffering and acting for His love.

“Fifthly. Be destitute of everything and the Sacred Heart of Jesus will enrich you. Empty yourself of all and He will fill you. Forget yourself and abandon yourself to Him: He will think of and take care of you. Embrace with love all that will humiliate and annihilate you the most effectively, as means calculated to bring about the triumph of the gentle, lovable Heart of Jesus and to make your heart reign in His. Live there as a child which has no care beyond loving Him, and abandoning itself to Him, and in Him. Keep your soul in peace without falling into trouble or anxiety at the sight of your faults or miseries. These are good and useful insofar as they foster the love of our own abjection, which love should never leave us for a single instant. That is why, so long as God is not offended, we ought to be glad to see ourselves failing involuntarily.

“Fly all undue bustle and haste by trying to form your interior and exterior on the humble gentleness of the loving Heart of Jesus. Do each action with as much tranquillity as if it were the only one you had to do, and with the same purity of love as if it were the last of your life. Endeavour to employ each moment to the end for which it has been destined. Refrain your mind from all vain curiosity, above all as regards the concerns of others.

“In all this, my dear sister, together with what I have already said to you, you have a program for a whole lifetime. I beg of you, by all the love I have for you and which you have for the Sacred Heart, to be faithful in putting it into practice and making it your ordinary occupation. For, unless I am mistaken, herein lies perfection which God asks of you throughout the whole course of your life. And I repeat this. You are under a special obligation to the Sacred Heart of our good Master Who has so great a love for you. Love Him, therefore, in return, with all the love of which you are capable and offer Him continual thanksgiving, attributing

to Him always the glory of all good done. Have an inviolable fidelity to Him, cost what it may, for He is rich enough to recompense you for everything. I shall ask Him never to let you be separated from His pure love. Amen."

And then she wrote on self-surrender, self-surrender *without fear*:

"Under what a great obligation you are, my dear Sister, to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord for the tender love He has for you. It is a love which causes Him to show you such great mercy that He will not let you be lost, but will lead you by the direct road, whether you like it or not, to union with Himself. That is why this Sovereign Master, seeing that you desert Him so often to give yourself to another, has attached you to Himself just like a little dog, linking the cords of His love to that of your will, to draw you after Him. And because He takes you along a road rough and somewhat rugged and thorny, you keep turning your head back to see if you can see anyone who will make it easier for you. But it is all to no purpose. You must go by that way such as it is. For it is now the time to suffer and struggle with humble submission so as to purify and perfect yourself in His way, thus to make yourself worthy for Him to accomplish His designs in you.

"What have you to fear since He surrounds you on every side with His power as with a wall, impregnable against the considerations of self-love which put such an obstacle to God's designs for you. Bury all your miseries in the Mercy of the lovable Heart of Jesus, and no longer have any other thought than that of loving Him to the forgetfulness of yourself. Then leave Him to do all that He wishes in you, with you and for you.

"These are the thoughts which have come to me for you. I trust in the grace of the Divine Heart that if you are faithful to putting them into practice He will allow you to feel the effects of His Divine liberality: that is to say, if you confide yourself fully to His goodness. I beg you to recommend to Him this most unworthy of all sinners. Ask Him to give me the true spirit of peni-

tence, and the grace to live and die in it. Do not doubt that I love you in His Sacred Heart with all the affection of my own. Take this for your motto: 'Love has conquered me. It alone shall possess my heart!'

God be blessed eternally."

* * *

And then the Saint spoke on abandonment to the will of God, urging that we love and please Him, "thinking often of what, at the hour of death, we should like to have done, and doing it now while we have the time lest we be taken by surprise."

"Do not think, my dearest Sister, that the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, because He does not give us the opportunity of speaking to each other, wishes for all this that we should be forgetful of each other in His presence. Not at all. But He does wish that we should live a life of love and of deprivation of support, friends and pleasure, all sacrificed to His adorable Will in whatever way He may wish to dispose of us. He wants no self-consideration, no reflection on anything beyond loving Him and pleasing Him in perfect forgetfulness of self, thinking often of what, at the hour of death, we should like to have done, and doing it now while we have the time lest we be taken by surprise. Never let yourself be troubled. Keep your soul in peace, wholly abandoned to the loving Providence of the Sacred Heart."

And then she wrote humbly to one who already fervently loved the Sacred Heart:

"Don't forget that, if I die before you, you are to take my place before the Blessed Sacrament. You will ask Our Lord to pardon all the irreverences which He has received from me. And if God is merciful to me, I won't forget you but will do everything in my power for you.

"In the meantime, my dearest Sister, there is nothing, sin excepted, which I do not desire for your advancement in holy love. Let us love one another, then, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus; let us

love Him the one for the other; let us love Him in every circumstance and repeat always as our watch-word: 'Thy Will be done.' Love and do what you will, for the soul who has love has everything. Do all through love, in love and for love, for it is love which gives value to everything.

"Love does not want a divided heart. It wants all or nothing. Love will make all things easy for you. So give back love for love and never forget Him Whose love made Him die for you. But you will really love Him only in so far as you are willing to suffer in silence, to prefer Him to the creature and eternity to time.

May God be blest."

* * *

One of the Saint's most magnificent letters was written to a novice who had asked her advice, one sentence of which was especially explanatory of Margaret-Mary's own attitude towards the harshness with which she herself often was treated: "Humility of heart. . . will make you accept gladly and as from the hand of your good Father, the humiliations and contradictions which will fall to you, never bothering to fix your attention on secondary causes." In short, what comes to us comes ultimately from God who allows it and always uses it for our good. How sound spiritually and psychologically was the advice never to bother fixing attention on *secondary* causes! Here, in part, is the remainder of the letter:

"You are to be deaf to the suggestions of self-love and of uncharitableness, in a word, to all that can wound the soul or sully the heart, be it ever so slightly. Never voluntarily entertain even one useless thought. All these things stop us from hearing the voice of our good Heavenly Father.

"Then you must be blind as regards the faults of others, never speaking ill of them nor passing judgment upon them. Be blind, too, in your own regard, allowing yourself to be guided in all things by holy obedience without either comment or reflection.

“Also, you must be dumb when it is a question of speaking of yourself whether in praise or in excuse. Remember that in praising yourself you render yourself an object of horror and contempt in the sight of God and His Angels. When you feel tempted to excuse yourself say: ‘My Jesus, Who was innocent, was silent when accused. Can I, a criminal, justify myself?’ Keep silence, then, and suffer through love. Do nothing through human respect and, when tempted to yield to it say: ‘No, my God, I shall do neither more, nor less by reason of the opinion of creatures. Since it is You alone Whom I want to please, it suffices that You see me everywhere.

“As regards your prayer, think when going to it that you are accompanying Our Lord into the Garden of Olives when He was going to make His Own prayer. Unite yourself with His holy dispositions and intentions. And when you find yourself set upon by dissipation, boredom or carelessness, make yourself this reproach whilst gently recalling your mind: ‘Can you not persevere for even this little time with Jesus in prayer?’ Then apply yourself again simply to your subject without worrying as to what your distractions were about. At the end, offer to the Eternal Father the prayer of His Son to make reparation for what has been wanting to your own. See to it, also, that the principal fruit you draw from your prayer be love of humility and simplicity.

“Follow the example of your Crucified Spouse Who never sought His Own glory but in everything, that of His Eternal Father. May you, then, find your glory henceforth only in humiliations. When they fall to your lot say: ‘This is my due, not approbation and praise!’

“Hold your heart always in peace, and don’t trouble yourself about anything, not even your faults. We must humble ourselves for them and correct them, but tranquilly and without being discouraged or cast down. The Lord dwells only in peace.

“Be careful to further with courage the designs Our Lord has for you. You will do this by abandoning yourself wholly to His Love.

And be sure, my dearest Sister, that on my side, the affection which I have for you will not allow me to spare you anything — following the lights which His Goodness will give me — in the way of humiliation and mortification. In doing so I shall merely be acting according to the desire which you yourself have expressed to me. But you can be sure that all will come to you from a heart as desirous of your perfection as I am of my own, never counting it a bother to render you my little services. I only hope that what I am saying will be helpful to you.”

To one who was troubled and afraid, she wrote:

“As regards your trouble, I shall talk to you quite simply as to my very beloved Sister. In the first place I feel that this fear which He gives you is the result of a very great love for you. For, seeing that His love is not strong enough in you to make you practise virtue and avoid evil, He is mingling fear with love that both together may achieve His desires. Let your fear always be a loving, filial fear which will lead you to do good and shun evil. Avoid all other fears, for they come only from the spirit of darkness. Then see to it that love gradually replaces this fear, saying in each of your actions: ‘It is for love of you, my God, that I do this. I renounce every other intention.’ Renew your vows as often as you feel yourself attacked by this trial.

“What weakens love in your heart is too great an attachment to the creature and to your own self-satisfaction. You must die to all that if you want pure love to reign in your heart. Moreover, you must break that attachment to your own will for it displeases the Sacred Heart of Jesus greatly. Because you take too much delight in the creature, He allows you to find only a disgust in prayer and in the practice of virtue. It is also to give you greater occasion for merit. But He wants from you constant fidelity. Cost what it may you must persevere in this regard, for the Sacred Heart is the enemy of every species of inconstancy. This fault is your greatest weakness. Yet you are the only who can, with God’s grace, remedy it and that only by doing continual violence to yourself. Resolution

is what you want, and you will never find peace until you are in the state of perfect deprivation in which God wishes you. Strive fervently then to attain to it because there can be no question of perfection for you otherwise. Forgetfulness of self and love of your own abjection are the shortest and surest means of attaining it.

“Your method of praying is good. Keep yourself during your prayer in a perfect conformity with the good pleasure of God whether He consoles you or afflicts you. Often make acts of submission and abandonment and ward off distractions quietly. Do not allow yourself to be troubled by all these fears of Hell, for I trust that the love of the Sacred Heart for you will be your protection from it. Make acts of hope and of trust in His Goodness which will not abandon you. And as regards my having taken you to task for your faults, see in this only a tender affection which will not let me hide them from you. For I have a great desire for your perfection and advancement in holy love. There is nothing I would not wish to do to help you achieve that. Work earnestly, then, to this end. God wants it from you and if you do not give it, He will most certainly exact an account from you of the graces you would have received if you had been faithful. You know this perfectly well. So carry out His desires faithfully, joyously and courageously, following the lights which He gives you.”

Part of the final advice Margaret-Mary gave to a beloved novice, at the time the Saint was relinquishing her post as Novice Mistress:

“Be gentle if you want to please the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ Who takes His pleasure only in the gentle and lowly of heart. Do not be worried or disquieted over anything, not even your faults, beyond humbling yourself when you fall into them. Even then keep yourself in peace and make a fresh start. This is how you must act if you want God to dwell within you for you must always look upon your soul as His sanctuary. It is for this reason that you must guard well against sullyng it with the slightest stain.

“Also you must make your heart a throne for His love. Withdrawing there, you will entertain yourself with Him in silence, adoring Him and loving Him with all your strength, casting from yourself all useless thoughts and all vain curiosity in order to listen in silence to what He will say to your heart. This latter you must empty of all considerations of self-love. Otherwise He will withdraw Himself from you and you will never be able to learn to converse with Him.

“Above all, I urge you to keep yourself light-hearted, joyous and contented. This is the true mark of the spirit of God Who wants you to serve Him in peace and contentment without any uneasiness or constraint. But you are to do everything with liberty of spirit and with the sole desire of pleasing Him.

“That is all I have to say to you concerning this one of your trials, all of which you ought to cherish as so many means of uniting yourself to the designs of God in your regard.

“To counteract those reflections which trouble your imagination, repeat the Psalm: ‘The Lord is my Light, whom shall I fear?’ Every evening say Psalm 67: ‘Let God arise.’ On lying down to sleep make three times the Sign of the Cross on your heart with Holy Water, saying the words: ‘Per signum Crucis.’ And when getting up in the morning make the Sign of the Cross on each of your five senses whilst repeating, ‘God holy, strong and immortal have mercy on us.’ Do this to ask strength from the Holy Trinity to resist courageously the attacks and suggestions of your enemies.

“You can be sure, my dear Sister, that so long as your will does not approve these thoughts, God will not consider Himself in any way offended. This is, of course, provided that you do not reflect upon them, but simply turn your mind as in contempt.”

And here, in another missive, speaks the Saint in might and power:

“I think that the Sacred Heart of Our Lord wants you to be attentive to three things. In the first place, He wishes you to love Him with a love of preference which will make you surmount

your repugnances and trample underfoot the human respect which would suggest: 'What will they say if I perform this practice of virtue?' You must trample upon all such suggestions whenever it is a question of pleasing this Divine Heart. Secondly, you must underrate, judge or condemn no one except yourself. In acting thus you will observe charity and humility and avoid the judgment and condemnation of your Judge. The third thing, and the one which is to be your chief object is this — that you find all your delight in Him, thus rendering yourself worthy that He finds His in you. He wants you to pattern your heart on the virtues of His Own. If you only knew what sorrow you cause Him when you fail in charity or humility, or when, through laxity, you disregard the inspirations He gives you to withdraw yourself from the way of dissipation and self-interest! He holds this latter in horror and it prevents Him from bestowing His graces more abundantly upon you. I think that I have said all this to you already, but He wishes me to impress it on you again. It seems to me that He does not want you to have any new practices for the present, but that you will please and content Him much by being faithful to those which you already have. Try, then, to correspond to His love; giving Him all yours in the exact and faithful practice of all our holy Rules; banishing all idle curiosity; refusing to be startled or discouraged by difficulties; keeping your soul always in peace; never complaining, and finding all your joy in self-annihilation. If you love Him, nothing will be difficult."

Again and again, the Saint would begin or end her letters with the loving words, "my little one. . ." *In Christ she loved people* — and if we are tempted to say that must have seemed odd indeed in seventeenth century Paray, perhaps we should reflect that it is a trifle too rare in twentieth century living, too. . . Once she wrote a novice, "Keep always a little love for one who cherishes you tenderly in the lovable Heart of Jesus, outside of which we must love nothing. Pray much for me and be sure that I shall never forget you when in His Presence. . ." Yet in her trenchant putting of "first

things first," she was perfectly capable of saying in the same letter, "If you do not profit by what I have said to you, the Sacred Heart will abandon you and I shall give you up, too." Remember though, that these words came from the Saint who gave the last half of her life in reparation for others, and did not hesitate to endure tortures to win redemption for her persecutors.

Perhaps we can do no better, in closing these excerpts, than quoting yet one more, ". . . keep your soul always in peace — at rest in Him. And no matter how He may dispose of you, never be troubled, but unite yourself always to His intentions."

CHAPTER V

THE FEAST OF THE SACRED HEART

When the Holy Father defines a Dogma, it actually does not mean that something new is being introduced, but rather that at an appropriate time the Vicar of Christ declares infallibly to be true something that always has been implicit in Church doctrine and in the custody of Christ's Church.

In something of the same way, when a feast is given approbation and then extended to the universal Church, this too in God's vast economy usually has a lengthy history. In the Middle-Ages, many Fathers and Doctors, v.g. St. Bonaventure, and two nuns particularly, St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde, had a clear vision of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Then in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries two great heresies, Protestantism and Jansenism respectively, came along and distorted one of the essential truths of Christianity: the love of God for humankind.

As early as 1670, during the lifetime of St. Margaret-Mary, an Office and a Mass of the Sacred Heart was composed by St. John Eudes for the so-called Congregation of Eudists. Then — then came St. Margaret-Mary, and the great Revelation of June 16, 1675, when Christ asked her to institute a feast of the Sacred Heart on the Friday following the Octave of Corpus Christi. And finally, Blessed Claude and the Society of Jesus were appointed by God to propagate the devotion.

God was bringing up His "big guns" in His centuries-long wooing of the heart of mankind.

In 1765, Clement XIII gave his approbation to the feast and the Office of the Sacred Heart, and in 1856 Pius IX extended it to the universal Church. Thus only 66 years after the death of St.

Margaret-Mary, one of the central points of her Revelations was realized. In 1929, Pius XI composed a new Mass and Office for this feast, and gave it a privileged Octave of the third Order.

* * *

In order properly to participate in or assist at the Mass and Office of the Sacred Heart, we would need to make a personal act of consecration to the Sacred Heart. Many have been written, all most worthy in intent and words. However, perhaps we could do no better than to use the one written long ago by St. Margaret-Mary Alacoque herself, the one superbly led by Christ in her acts and in her words. It is as follows:

"I, N. . ., give myself and consecrate to the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ my person and my life, my actions, pains, and sufferings, so that I may be unwilling to make use of any part of my being save to honor, love, and glorify the Sacred Heart.

This is my unchanging purpose, namely, to be all His, and to do all things for the love of Him, at the same time renouncing with all my heart whatever is displeasing to Him.

I therefore take Thee, O Sacred Heart, to be the only object of my love, the guardian of my life, my assurance of salvation, the remedy of my weakness and inconstancy, the atonement for all the faults of my life and my sure refuge at the hour of death.

Be then, O Heart of goodness, my justification before God Thy Father, and turn away from me the strokes of His righteous anger, O Heart of love, I put all my confidence in Thee, for I fear everything from my own wickedness and frailty; but I hope for all things from Thy goodness and bounty.

Do Thou consume in me all that can displease Thee or resist Thy holy will. Let Thy pure love imprint Thee so deeply upon my heart that I shall nevermore be able to forget Thee or to be separated from Thee. May I obtain from all Thy loving kindness the grace of having my name written in Thee, for in Thee I desire to place all my happiness and all my glory, living and dying in true bondage to Thee."

CHAPTER VI

“THY END IS THY BEGINNING” — THE GREAT RETREAT

Lacking the superb leadership, the “pull” into better things, of saints and geniuses alike, a given civilization will become static and then die.

Society is dependent for its progress upon its saints and upon having in sufficient numbers men and women of dedicated genius.

Yet it is never easy to be either a saint or a creative genius (and some have been both, remember), because such persons are ahead of their times by years or by centuries. Therefore their contemporaries may find them fairly alarming characters. The saint lives to an extraordinary degree with God, whereas most people unfortunately do not — thus the scene is set for trouble.

There is evidence that saints and geniuses realize that they are ahead of their times, and that difficulties therefore will come to them, but that they have a certain inward peace about the situation. They may go through unshirted hell themselves, *but their contribution will stand*. To them, that is what matters. Thus as she died much too early, as we look at things, St. Margaret-Mary evidently had full knowledge that the riches of the Sacred Heart devotion to which she had added so enormously would stand throughout time, even though she wanted to be personally forgotten as the wind and the dust. That was humility, but that was not a correct analysis, for Christ did not want it so.

There came the final year, when the ailing St. Margaret-Mary asked her Superior to let her make a forty day retreat ahead of

the community. This was granted. Reviewing the writings and literature regarding the Saint, it seems surprising that the request was granted. It may have been due to the intervention of Christ in the mind and heart of the Superior, or it just *may* be that the incredible thought had entered the minds of some of the Paray nuns that instead of being a problem-child, Sister Alacoque might have been stable and truthful all along in which case she might be a saint of the Church. In the latter case, they probably had given a thought to their own status in history. In actuality, they are remembered today only insofar as they impinged in some way upon the little Saint of Paray. This too has its classic counterpart: Pontius Pilate, the shrewd and compromising ruler, remembered now only because Christ appeared on trial before him. If this seems a harsh comparison, it may be suggested that God does not want his saints to be fought by those also calling themselves His children, any more than He wants disunity anywhere within Christendom.

What happened to the Saint during those vital forty days? We know only a little about it, except that St. Margaret-Mary knew that it was her period of preparation for death.

When she came out of the special private retreat, her health was unimproved. It was almost time for the community retreat. One of the nuns — quite a number had come to good speaking terms with her lately — asked her whether she wouldn't also be making the community retreat. The Saint replied cryptically that she would indeed, but it would be "the Great Retreat." The nun did not realize until later what she meant. Perhaps we can understand this: people have a blindness when the Dark Figure of Death moves forward to claim another human being. (This is especially true when it is a greatly loved person; and, this nun was one who liked the Saint who had walked unrecognized . . . or almost so . . . among them).

On the evening of the day before the retreat was scheduled to begin, Margaret-Mary became ill and took to her bed for the last

time. She was to arise only in Christ's arms. The Paray physician, a Dr. Billet, was called but he found nothing alarming in her condition; he was quite prepared to wager she'd recover. Margaret-Mary announced that she would recover. Told that the doctor said no, she replied with a certain humor that under the circumstances, it was better that he should say what was not true than that she should do so.

She could not persuade anyone that she should receive Holy Viaticum. Finally she put her request less alarmingly, by simply asking to receive Holy Communion, and this was then granted. That she received it as Viaticum was known to her alone.

She was suffering greatly now, but she refused help on the basis that the time was short now, and too precious to waste. During her last night, she was cared for by her former novice, Sister Marie Nicole de la Faige des Claines. Previously, she had sent too for her beloved little Aloysius Gonzaga. "Come and see me, my dear Sister, for I shall die of this illness, and we shall not have very long to be together."

At the last, she was seized with great fear; this was not unnatural, as many Doctors of the Church have pointed out, for the body was appointed by God to be the House of the Soul, and it gives up this job only with considerable struggle at times. She cried for mercy as she bent before the All-Powerful, and then came peace. She had to be raised up in bed to be able to breathe. Still — so near the Great Journey — she thought of the welfare of the Sacred Heart devotion. She was utterly convinced that she was a stumbling-block to its acceptance. She begged those around her write to a distinguished Jesuit who knew the secret of the Revelations, and beg him to destroy her letters and never reveal her secret; she asked that her "copybooks" or autobiography, written under authority, be burned. (Fortunately, this was not carried out.) Later, she asked for Extreme Unction and the priest was summoned. The Superior, realizing at last, it seems, that the Saint was indeed dying, wanted to send for the doctor, but Margaret-Mary told her that

it would not help. As the priest was finishing the Fourth Unction, she — like St. Joan of Arc — cried “Jesus!” and died.

Typically, the doctor arrived after she was dead.

It was October 17, 1690, between 7 and 8 p.m.

* * *

The Paray nuns had a field day coping with the village populace. They thronged into the area as soon as the church doors opened, trying to touch articles to her body, begging pieces of her habit or some other relic, or scraps of her handwriting. (This was the same village that, not so very long ago, had wanted to send her to prison because she had refused to recommend reception of a young lady without a vocation).

Those ready to give relics, if any existed, found that so strict was Margaret-Mary’s adherence to the rule of poverty, she had in her cell only her Rule and her discipline.

The zeal of Mgr. Languet, Vicar General of Autun and afterwards Archbishop of Sens, brought about the introduction of the Cause of Margaret-Mary’s beatification in 1915. In 1729, his book “Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret-Mary” appeared under his signature — which took courage. The French Jansenists were at their height, and they were implacably opposed to the Sacred Heart devotion or anything that caused people — ordinary people — to approach Christ with confidence. Some of their extremists taught that no one was worthy of receiving Christ’s body and blood in Communion, and went their lives through without receiving. (*Why* they thought Christ instituted the Sacrament, is unknown.) Devotion to a Christ of tremendous love for all kinds of people, even (or especially) sinners? It was unthinkable to them. Perhaps Languet might have hesitated, but a strong note from Sister de Farges at the Visitation, who had been transformed in outlook by Margaret-Mary, brought him to decision. And in fact, he did suffer greatly from extraordinary attacks made upon him by “Jansenists and Philosophers.”

The Cause was long in triumphing, but in every age Christ had valiant defenders of his beloved St. Margaret-Mary, and those who cared about promoting her Cause.

There are many fascinating details that anyone revering the Saint can trace down with much interest. There's the story of the little Chapel of the Sacred Heart, which finally was built two years before St. Margaret-Mary's death in the Garden at Paray. There were no great artists in Paray; even had there been, it is difficult to convey a spiritual concept, an idea hitherto unexecuted, to another. Margaret-Mary never was quite satisfied with the Sacred Heart sketches made in her day; the best, she thought, was made by one of the Sisters who was young, had no "taught" artistic knowledge at all, but who did love the Saint and had some idea what she was trying to convey.

In any case, after many attempts, a picture was made and executed for the chapel. For this, Margaret-Mary ever expressed herself as grateful, and she said she found it beautiful. This very picture, upon which the Saint gazed so often, was taken from Paray by the revolutionists . . . the Paray nuns were dispersed for a while. . . and finally came to be preserved by the parish church of Semur-en-Brionnais. They refused to part with it later, and today the Paray chapel has only a copy as its principal ornament.

Throughout the revolutionary period, the body or bones of the Saint were preserved, often a'most miraculously. God intended to carry out many projects upon earth by means of these sacred relics, these first-class relics now scarce but still obtainable.

Thousands of pilgrims visit the Shrine every year. It would be foolish even to try to list the more noted ones. Yet it is interesting to Americans that one was Pauline Jaricot, foundress of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and of the Living Rosary, was one of them — Pauline Jaricot, who with the Cure' d'Ars made St. Philomena famous, and whose own cause now has been introduced.

In St. Margaret-Mary, even the least of us have a strong advocate with God.

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