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the Promises of Our Lord



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to St. Margaret Mary

PROMISES
OF OUR LORD
TO ST. MARGARET MARY
(A textual, theological and pastoral study)



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72386

Edited, published and printed
by
The National Office
Apostleship of Prayer (India)

Available at : Sacred Heart Residence,
Dindigul-624 004, Tamil Nadu, India.

Cum permissu superiorum

Imprimatur ✠ Thomas Fernando, Bishop of Tiruchirappalli.

DIVISION

- A) THE TABULAR FORM OF THE PROMISES
- B) THE PROMISES IN THEIR AUTHENTIC WORDING AS FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. MARGARET MARY

Whenever we speak of the Promises, it is of the highest importance that we make a clear distinction between A and B.

REFERENCE

All the quotations are taken from Volume II of "Vie et Oeuvres de Sainte Marguerite Marie", Nouvelle edition authentique publiee en 1920 par le Monastere de la Visitation, d'apres la troisieme edition de Monseigneur Gauthey.

Bishop Gauthey was the great specialist on the writings of St. Margaret Mary. He published in three volumes all the documents concerning her. The second one contains her writings.

He published the third edition of "Vie et Oeuvres" in 1915. Pope Benedict XV wrote to him a letter, congratulating him on his highly scholarly work (19 January, 1916). The letter is found at the beginning of the 1st volume of the edition published by the Visitation Monastery in 1920.

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In our references "L" stands for letter and "p" for page of Volume II.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A) THE TABULAR FORM OF THE PROMISES

I - The Text	...	1
II - Who drew up this tabular form ?	...	2
III - Textual criticism of the tabular form	...	3
IV - Pastoral and theological criticism	...	7

B) THE AUTHENTIC PROMISES

Introduction	...	9
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Part One : A study of the Promises in general

I - Place of the mystical revelations of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary in the history of salvation	...	10
II - Designs of our Lord in his mystical revelations	...	12
III - Textual remarks about the Promises	...	16
IV - Theological study on the Promises in general	...	18

Part Two: A detailed study of each Promise

I - Three great general Promises	...	24
II - Promise to persons consecrated to the Heart of Jesus	...	26
III - Promise concerning the picture	...	29
IV - Promises to families	...	34
V - Promises to religious communities	...	36
VI - Promises concerning the apostolate	...	37

A) THE TABULAR FORM OF THE PROMISES

I

The Text

Promises of our Lord
to the persons devoted to his Sacred Heart

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will bless every home where the image of my Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honoured.
4. I will console them in all their difficulties.
5. I will be their refuge during life and especially at the hour of death.
6. I will shed abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
7. Sinners shall find in my Heart a boundless ocean of mercy.
8. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
9. Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection.
10. I will give priests the power of softening the hardest hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in my Heart, never to be effaced.
12. I promise you that, in the excessive mercy of my Heart, my all-powerful love will grant to all who communicate on the first Friday of the month for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance; they shall not die in my displeasure nor without their sacraments; my divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in their last moments.

II

Who has drawn up this tabular form ? *

Not St. Margaret Mary. All the promises she reports are found scattered here and there without any order in her letters to different persons.

None of the ancient writers on St. Margaret Mary, like Fr. Croiset, Fr. Froment, Fr. Gallifet. Fr. Croiset, s. j. was the Spiritual Director of St. Margaret Mary after Bl. Claude la Colombiere and Fr. Rolin. Fr. Froment, a Jesuit who lived for some time in Paray, knew the saint well. Fr. Gallifet, s. j. was the postulator of the cause of St. Margaret Mary in Rome and published the book "De Cultu SS. Cordis Dei et Domini nostri Jesu Christi" in 1726.

Though these authors quote large extracts of her writings containing promises, they never present the tabular form.

Not the early Sisters of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial. The life of St. Margaret Mary written by the Sisters who had known her (Memoires des Contemporaines) contains only long extracts of her letters, in which some promises are mentioned, but nowhere do we find the tabular form.

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As far as we know from existing documents, the tabular form of the promises was published **for the First Time in 1863**, that is one year before the beatification of Margaret Mary. It was found on the cover page of a booklet which was printed in Le Puy (France) with ecclesiastical approval.

* We give here only a few facts which will be useful for the textual and pastoral criticism of the tabular form. Its full history will be given in part three.

In 1882, Philip A. Kemper, a businessman of Dayton (United States) undertook to spread the promises. He had the first eleven promises of the tabular form printed on a picture of the Sacred Heart and distributed profusely in all parts of the world. By 1895 the promises had already been translated into 238 languages.

In 1890, Cardinal Adolph Louis Perraud, the Bishop of Autun in whose diocese lies Paray-le-Monial, **deplored this circulation of the promises** in the tabular form which in his own words “were obviously pretty different from the words and even from the meaning of the expressions used by St. Margaret Mary” and wanted that the promises be published in the full, authentic texts as found in the writings of St. Margaret Mary. We know this from the Annals of the monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial.

III

Textual Criticism of the Tabular Form

This tabular form has several serious drawbacks which may have been one of the reasons for the decline of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus amongst people who identified the devotion with the tabular form of the promises.

The first drawback is textual inaccuracy, which sometimes amounts to utter inauthenticity. (Only the text of the twelfth promise is absolutely accurate, literally taken from the writings of St. Margaret Mary and so we shall place it among the authentic promises.)

Here are the main textual inaccuracies :

1) Change of the mode of speech

The formulae have been put in direct speech on the lips of our Lord.

“ I will establish peace in their families ”

“ I will console them in all their difficulties ”

“ Sinners shall find in my Heart ”

“ I will bless the homes in which the image of my Heart...”

Now, if some of these formulae are found in the writings of St. Margaret Mary, they are always in the indirect speech: v. g. “ Our Lord made known to me that He would bless ... ”

Of course, the direct speech is more striking and forceful but our sense of truth, our quest for utter genuineness and authenticity does not allow such a tampering with texts.

Besides, this tabular form may give people the impression that our Lord Himself has dictated or pronounced all these formulae as they stand and in the very same order.

This is absolutely wrong. We have already seen that the tabular form is found nowhere in the writings of St. Margaret Mary.

2) Unwarranted generalization

The eleventh formula reads: “ Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in my Heart, never to be effaced.” Truly, in several places of her writings (L. 41, L. 39, L. 89) St. Margaret Mary says that our Lord has written or would write the names of certain persons in his Heart owing to their zeal in spreading the devotion to his Heart.

But nowhere do we find the slightest indication that our Lord promised to do so for everyone who propagates this devotion and so this should not be given as a promise of our Lord. What could at most be said is this: Our Lord promised that certain persons would have their names written in his Heart owing to their zeal in spreading this devotion, and so if we take pains to spread it, we also may perhaps hope that our Lord will grant us the same favour.

3) Change of words

Words found in the original text of St. Margaret Mary have been left out or replaced by others. These changes make our Lord say things which He actually did not say.

a) The tenth formula reads: "I will give *priests* the power of softening the hardest hearts" while the original text has: "My divine Master has made known to me that *those who work for the salvation of souls* will have the power of" (L. 141).

b) The sixth formula has: "I will shed *abundant* blessings on all their undertakings" while the original has: "the blessings of *Heaven*" (benedictions du ciel). (L. 141)

c) The third formula reads: "I will bless *every home* where the image of my Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honoured." The original text has: "He promises that He will pour abundantly his blessings upon *all the places* where the image of his Heart shall be exposed and honoured." (L. 131)

4) Additions of words and phrases

Formula 7 reads: "Sinners shall find in my Heart a boundless ocean of mercy." In the writings of St. Margaret Mary we find beautiful passages on the mercy of our Lord; and the idea expressed by the formula is in harmony with her thoughts. But nowhere in her writings do we find the words "ocean of mercy" or "sinners shall find in my Heart".

Formulae 8 and 9 read: "Tepid souls shall become fervent." "Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection." The ideas here expressed reflect the saint's mind and may correspond to some of her statements. v. g. "I do not know of any devotion in the spiritual life that is better suited to raise a soul in a short time to the highest perfection." (L. 141, p. 627) But, as they stand, the two formulae are not found anywhere in her writings, and still less given as the words of our Lord.

5) The distinction between real promises made by our Lord and statements of St. Margaret Mary has not been sufficiently kept.

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
4. I will console them in all their difficulties.
6. I will shed abundant blessings on all their undertakings.

These formulae seem to have all been taken from Letter 141 which St. Margaret Mary wrote to her Spiritual Director. Here is the passage which concerns us: "Strive especially to get religious to practise this devotion for they will draw much help from it... . As for the laity, they will find in this lovable devotion all the helps necessary for their state of life : peace in their families, comfort in their work, the blessing of Heaven on all their undertakings, consolation in their afflictions..." (L. 141, pp. 627-628)

WHAT TO REMARK ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Though at the beginning of this letter St. Margaret Mary mentions a promise of our Lord to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus and though she ends it with the promise to those who would spread the devotion to his Heart, this is not a sufficient reason to consider the whole letter as an explicit promise of our Lord. The place of this passage, its context before and after, its very wording clearly show that it is St. Margaret Mary who expresses her ideas about the devotion.

Of course, she has received great lights from our Lord on the advantages of the devotion, as she herself says at the beginning of the letter: "I wish I could relate all that I know of this lovable devotion and reveal to the whole world the treasury of graces that Jesus Christ has hidden in his adorable Heart and intends to pour out in profusion upon all those who will practise it!"

But this is no reason for justifying us in giving all the statements made in the letter, however true they may be, as explicit promises made by our Lord, and still less for putting them in the mouth of our Lord, making Him each time say "I will ..."

IV

Pastoral and theological criticism of the tabular form

Besides textual inaccuracies, the tabular form has serious drawbacks of a pastoral or even theological nature. Even when authentic, these formulae have been considerably abbreviated, taken out of the immediate context and the larger context of the writings of St. Margaret Mary.

Especially the conditions required by our Lord for the fulfilment of the promises or the dispositions demanded by Him, have in most cases been omitted, or not sufficiently explained.

We shall give only two examples.

Formula 3 says that our Lord will bless the places where the image of his Heart will be exposed and honoured. But there is not a word of explanation of what 'honour' means, whereas St. Margaret Mary immediately goes on to explain: "He is looking for empty hearts devoid of self-love to fill them with the gentle unction of his ardent charity, so as to transform them entirely into Himself. He is seeking humble and submissive souls that want nothing but the accomplishment of his good pleasure" (L. 131, p. 532).

Formula 5 says that our Lord will be their refuge at the hour of death, but no condition whatsoever is given, while St. Margaret Mary immediately adds: "But, for that, they must live conformably to his holy maxims"

(L. 132, p. 550).

As they stand, these formulae may look something like formulae whose realization seems to be nearly automatic, and by which most marvellous results can be obtained, ranging from success in enterprise to a high degree of sanctity and apostolic achievements — and all this scarcely without any effort, just by means of a few practices or on the vague condition of “having devotion to the Sacred Heart”.

All this may be misleading. The devotion to the Heart of Jesus may appear just as something sentimental, like a sugar coated Christianity and not

*“ the synthesis of all religion,
the pattern of a more perfect life ”*

(Pius XI - “ Misericordissimus Redemptor ”)

“ the most efficient training in divine love ”

(Pius XII - “ Haurietis Aquas ”)

*“ a noble and worthy form of that authentic piety which today,
particularly after the decrees of the Second Vatican Council,
we should foster towards the person of Jesus Christ ”*

(Paul VI - “ Investigabiles divitias Christi ”).

It would not be the true and strong Christianity that the modern Christian wants.

FROM ALL THE ABOVE REASONS IT IS QUITE CLEAR THAT WE OUGHT NOT TO PRESENT THE PROMISES OF OUR LORD CONCERNING THE DEVOTION TO HIS HEART IN THAT SCHEMATIC AND TABULAR FORM, BUT QUOTE THE ABSOLUTELY AUTHENTIC, FULL AND RICH WORDING USED BY OUR LORD AND TRANSMITTED TO US BY ST. MARGARET MARY.

B) THE AUTHENTIC PROMISES

THREE PARTS

Part One : A study of the promises in general

Part Two : A detailed study of each promise

Part Three : Additional studies for a deeper understanding of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus and of the promises.

INTRODUCTION

A Letter of St. Margaret Mary *

Would that I could tell all I know about this lovable devotion and reveal to the whole world the treasures of graces which Jesus Christ keeps in his adorable Heart and wishes to shower with profusion on all those who will practise it!

Yes, I am certain that if people knew how pleasing this devotion is to Jesus Christ, there would not be a Christian with so little love for this lovable Saviour as not to practise it at once.

It is perfectly clear that there is no one in the world who would not receive every kind of help from Heaven if he had a truly grateful love for Jesus Christ. It is such a love one shows by practising devotion to his Sacred Heart.

(St. Margaret Mary, L. 141
to her Spiritual Director, p. 626)

* This letter was published by Fr. Croiset in his book "Devotion to the Sacred Heart" in 1691, one year after the death of St. Margaret Mary.

PART ONE

A STUDY OF THE PROMISES IN GENERAL

I

**Place of the Mystical Revelations *
of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary
in the history of salvation**

In matters of faith or of a cult, we ought not to confuse the dogmatic foundation of the truth or the cult, which is always scripture and tradition with an occasion more or less extraordinary which is for us a reminder of that truth or an incitement to live up to it.

We do not believe in the Immaculate Conception because Mary appeared to St. Bernadette at Lourdes, but because the Pope basing himself on scripture and tradition, defined it. Yet, more than all speculative considerations, or the most eloquent sermons, these apparitions of Lourdes have drawn people to venerate the Immaculate Conception, understand Mary's maternal love and imitate her purity.

* Name given to these revelations by the Church herself (cf. *Liturgia Horarum* IV p. 1208). This name has been given only to the revelations made to St. Margaret Mary (*mysticas revelationes habere meruit, praesertim de devotione erga Cor Jesu, ad cujus cultum in Ecclesiam inducendum multa egit*) and to those made to St. Theresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church (*mysticas habuit revelationes*) cf. *Liturgia Horarum* IV p. 1203.

We thus see that though our faith or our cult is in no way based on charismatic events (visions, miracles), yet these extraordinary supernatural manifestations are of great importance in the history of salvation. They are concrete facts, more present and visible to us, a living testimony of God's power and of the proximity of his love.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not based on the mystical revelations of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary; it is based on Holy Scripture and solidly founded on Christian dogma.* However, these mystical revelations have providentially played a great part in the development of the devotion.

Their importance and value consist in this. They are for us a striking reminder of the Gospel; they are, so to say, the Gospel re-enacted for us, vividly brought home to us.

Our Lord's manifestation of his Heart in the mystical apparitions to St. Margaret Mary is a modern forceful reminder of the first, the great manifestation of his Heart—the opening of his side on Calvary and the piercing of his Heart, which was the last and supreme token of his love.

The words of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary, telling us his love and expressing his desire that we should love Him in return, are but an echo, powerful and close to us, of the words of the Gospel: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love" (Jn. 15 :9-10).

In his encyclical 'Haurietis Aquas', Pope Pius XII speaks about the mystical revelations of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary. This is what he says :

* See "In the Bible, the Mystery of the Heart of Jesus" published by the Apostleship of Prayer, India.

"The revelations made to St. Margaret Mary did not present any new tenet of Catholic doctrine. But the importance of such revelations lies in this that Christ our Lord, showing his most Sacred Heart, wished in an extraordinary and singular manner to recall the human race to the contemplation and veneration of the mystery of love of the most merciful God. For by this particular manifestation Christ presented his Heart in distinct and oft repeated words as the symbol by which men should be drawn to know and acknowledge his love; and at the same time He established it as the sign and pledge of his mercy and grace for the needs of the Church in our times."

(A. A. S. vol. XXXXVIII, p. 340)

II

Designs of our Lord in his Mystical Revelations to St. Margaret Mary

To understand the real meaning of the promises our Lord made to St. Margaret Mary, we must first of all consider the designs, the intentions of our Lord concerning the devotion to his Heart.

Why did our Lord show his Heart to St. Margaret Mary in his mystical apparitions?

Why does He wish that devotion and honour be paid to It?

What is in the eyes of Christ the aim of the devotion to his Heart?

Here is the answer: **"Our Salvation"**. As in the Gospel, everything is explained by Christ's love for us and his ardent desire to save us.

To use the very words of St. Margaret Mary *, this devotion is explained by

" the ardent desire of his love to pour itself out "

(L. 132, p. 550)

" his ardent desire to rekindle the love for God which has grown cold and nearly extinguished in the hearts of most Christians "

(L. 132, p. 556)

It has as its aim

" to withdraw many souls from perdition and put them on the way to salvation "

(L. 131, p. 530)

" to set up in the hearts of men the reign of his pure love "

(L. 131, p. 530)

It will be

" like a renewal of his redemption in our souls "

(L. 48, p. 321)

" a loving redemption to withdraw men from the empire of Satan and place them under the gentle, sweet freedom of the empire of his love "

(L. 133, p. 572)

Through it our Lord will bestow on us abundant graces of salvation and sanctification.

Our Lord Himself used these same words the very first time He showed his Heart to St. Margaret Mary (Aut. no. 53, p. 70) and the saint repeated them time and again.

* It would be more correct to say " words of our Lord ", as the immediate context obviously shows that she only repeats what she has heard from Him, and as is clearly seen in the longer passages quoted hereafter in which most of these expressions are reported by the saint as said by our Lord.

Graces of salvation : converting men to his love, and leading them into the eternal kingdom of love.

Graces of sanctification : an ever greater increase in love of Him, an ever greater union with Him, an ever greater transformation into Him.

This division reminds us of the text of St. John :

“That they may have life, and have it abundantly” (10 : 10).

AND NOW LET US SEE SOME TEXTS

Once as I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament... He disclosed to me the marvels of his love and the inexplicable secrets of his Sacred Heart which so far He had concealed from me. Then it was that for the first time, He opened to me his divine Heart in a manner so real and sensible as to be beyond all doubt... HE TOLD ME : “ My divine Heart is so inflamed with love for men and for you in particular that, being unable any longer to contain within Itself the flames of its burning charity, It must needs spread them abroad by your means, and manifest Itself to men in order to enrich them with the precious treasures which I discover to you and which contain graces of sanctification and salvation necessary to withdraw them from the abyss of perdition.”

(Aut. no. 53, p. 70)

Our Lord MADE ME UNDERSTAND that the ardent desire He had of being loved by men and of rescuing them from the path of perdition into which Satan was hurrying them in great numbers, had caused Him to fix upon this plan of manifesting his Heart to men, together with all Its treasures of love, mercy, grace, sanctification and salvation which It contains. This He did in order that those who were willing to do all in their power to render to It and procure for It honour, love and glory, might be enriched profusely with these divine treasures of the Heart of God, which is their source ...

... He **SHOWED ME** that this devotion was as a last effort of his love which wished to favour men in these latter times with this loving redemption, in order to withdraw them from the empire of Satan, which He intended to destroy, and in order to place us under the gentle freedom of the empire of his love. This reign of his love He would set up in the hearts of all those who would take to this devotion.

(L. 133, pp. 571–573)

This devotion to the divine Heart of Christ will withdraw a great number of souls from perdition and put them on the way to salvation. That is why **HE HAS SUCH AN ARDENT DESIRE** to be known, loved and honoured by men. He wants by this devotion to establish in their hearts the reign of his pure love. (L. 131, p. 530)

... This divine Heart, by means of this devotion, will withdraw a great number of souls from perdition, thus ruining the empire of Satan, and place them through his sanctifying graces on the way to eternal salvation, as it seems to me **HE HAS PROMISED** his unworthy slave. (L. 132, p. 550)

HE HAS SHOWN ME that this devotion is one of the last efforts of his love for men, in order that, by placing before them in a special representation his divine Heart pierced by love for their salvation, He might be able to make their salvation secure. He will not allow any one of those who would be consecrated to his Heart to be lost, and this because of the great desire He has to be known, loved and honoured by his creatures, and also that He might in some manner satisfy the ardent desire of his love to pour itself out by bestowing upon them in abundance all sanctifying and salutary graces. He will be their secure shelter at the hour of death, to receive them and defend them against their enemies. (L. 132, p. 550)

The same ideas are found

in a letter to her elder brother Chrysostom

(L. 102, pp. 445–446)

in two letters to Mother de Saumaise

(L. 100, p. 437 ; L. 97, p. 428)

in a letter to Mother Dubuysson (L. 92, p. 417)

These texts about the designs of our Lord concerning the devotion to his Heart give us a clearer, deeper and fuller understanding of the nature of the devotion itself and of the promises. **That is why these texts are so important.**

N. B. Let us note here that when our Lord in his manifestations to St. Margaret Mary tells us how much He loves us and how much He wishes to be loved by us, this is in no way with an interested motive, **but out of the purest and most disinterested love for us.** His only desire is to save us, namely, to make us happy with Him in Heaven. But, for that, it is absolutely necessary that we accept his love, namely, that we love Him in return.

III

Textual Remarks About The Promises

1) The promises our Lord made to St. Margaret Mary are intimately and quite logically connected with the intentions our Lord had in manifesting his Heart. The texts speaking of the designs of our Lord and the texts giving the promises are very often interwoven. The promise immediately follows or precedes a text mentioning his intention.

Nay more, often the very manifestation of his intention constitutes a real promise, as our Lord Himself clearly states what He intends to do, and therefore what He will actually do.

2) As regards the writings of St. Margaret Mary (whether concerning the promises, or the intentions of our Lord, or whether they describe the advantages and fruits of the devotion), they may be divided into the following categories :

a) Texts which St. Margaret Mary clearly reports as having been said by our Lord: "He told me", "He made me understand" etc.

b) Texts in which St. Margaret Mary clearly speaks in her own name, as putting down ideas which occurred to her. v. g. concerning the size of a picture to be printed.

c) Texts of St. Margaret Mary which, however, from the immediate context, their contents and their very style show that she speaks in the name of our Lord, under lights received from Him.

Now whenever we speak or write about the "PROMISES" of our Lord we should quote only the texts (a), namely those containing the words which St. Margaret Mary herself reports as having been told her by our Lord.

But after quoting these texts it will be very useful to add some texts of St. Margaret Mary which explain and illustrate the promises, and are a kind of excellent commentary on them. Besides, her words set forth admirably well the effects and advantages of the devotion and so are most useful to understand the true nature of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

v. g.

The chief end of this devotion is to convert souls to his love.
(L. 64, p. 355)

It is one of the particular effects of this devotion to reunite divided hearts and to pacify souls. (L. 132, p. 557)

By this devotion our Lord wants to give Christians a new means of loving God through his Sacred Heart, of loving Him as much as He expects and deserves to be loved. (L. 132, p. 556)

IV

Theological Study on the Promises in General**A) RELATION WITH THE PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL**

In the writings of St. Margaret Mary we do find promises made by our Lord in favour of those who practise devotion to his Heart.

As we mentioned before, when we speak or write about them, we must quote the authentic text in full and in its immediate context, explain them in the larger context of the writings of St. Margaret Mary and especially mention the conditions for their fulfilment and the exigencies of true devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

If this is done, how do the Promises appear from a theological point of view?

Like the whole message of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary, they are a part of the history of salvation.

They are vivid and moving reminders of Christ's promises in the Gospel, v. g. the beatitudes, the promises to trustful prayer or to a definite act of virtue like forgiving others. They are, in a certain way, a part of the new and eternal alliance of God with men. Like the promises of Christ in the Gospel they are expressions of Christ's love for us and of his salvific will, but demanding at the same time the fulfilment of what He asks of us.

B) SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE GOSPEL PROMISES AND THOSE FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. MARGARET MARY

Most striking is the similarity between the promises of Christ in the Gospel and those made by Him in his mystical revelations to St. Margaret Mary.

1) As in the Gospel, Christ did not promise mere material prosperity.

In the Gospel, Christ promises peace, rest, consolation (Mt. 11 : 28-29), but nowhere does He promise mere material prosperity. Similarly in the writings of St. Margaret Mary. She clearly says :

“To speak frankly, I do not think that the graces He promises you, consist in an abundance of temporal things, since He says that this is frequently what impoverishes us in his grace and in love. It is with these that He desires to enrich your souls and your hearts.” (L. 113 to Mother Greyfie, p. 481)

We may note here that St. Margaret Mary's words in Letter 141 (included wrongly as a promise in the tabular form): “As for the laity, they will find through this devotion the blessings of Heaven on all their enterprises” have often been misunderstood as if the “blessings” meant “assured success in business”.

2) Just as in the Gospel, our Lord did not promise to St. Margaret Mary an easy way to Heaven.

Christ in the Gospel did several times promise eternal life but nowhere did He say that the way to it was easy, exempt from tribulations and sufferings. He said the very opposite: We have to take up our cross and follow Him (Mt. 16: 24). He foretold tribulations to his disciples and proclaimed them happy when they meet with the cross (Mt. 5: 11-12).

Our Lord spoke in the same way to St. Margaret Mary :

“Embrace the cross lovingly, whenever it comes, as the most precious token of love I can give you in this life” (Writings to Mother de Saumaise, no. 44, p. 154).

See more texts in the section : Promise of the Cross.

3) Like the promises our Lord made in the Gospel, those He made to St. Margaret Mary do not lead to self-interested piety, but to the purest love for God.

The promises our Lord made to St. Margaret Mary concern eternal life, all the graces and helps leading to it, all the blessings, spiritual or temporal, required for it.

To find fault with these promises made to St. Margaret Mary under the pretext of interestedness would be tantamount to blaming Christ for having promised us eternal life in the Gospel, or having called all those who suffer to come to Him for relief and consolation. He did not just say : “Be pure of heart,” but with the commandment added : “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” Again did He not promise to his disciples a hundredfold even in this life ?

(Mt. 19 : 29)

We should accept the promises made by Christ in the Gospel and those He made to St. Margaret Mary with joy and thankfulness as a gift of his love, for he who loves, gives and promises to give.

Christ knows that to do his will (avoiding sin and practising virtue, etc.) is indeed often difficult. He knows our weakness and also the desire of happiness He Himself has put in us, and so, to help our weakness, to encourage us and strengthen us in doing his will, He reminds us, through the promises, of the great reward of Eternal Life He will give us : “Your reward shall be great in Heaven” (Mt. 5 : 12).

Surely, Christ's Promises in the Gospel and those He made to St. Margaret Mary are special signs of his love.

So, if understood in the spirit of the Gospel, the promises He made to St. Margaret Mary will not lead anyone to self-interestedness but rather to the purest love for God, as we shall see presently.

Devotion to the Heart of Jesus, as set forth in the writings of St. Margaret Mary, is a means offered to us by our Lord to draw us to his love; a means by which He wants to pour out upon us more abundantly his mercy and grace.

Not to speak about the designs of our Lord concerning this devotion, about the promises He made and the admirable fruits that the devotion is bound to bear, would be like a refusal to share the riches that the Heart of Jesus has in store for us.

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But, however great those riches be, the Giver is far greater than the gift, and it is here that we reach the innermost core of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

That devotion must lead us to love Christ for Himself and not for the rewards He may give us. It must lead us to the purest and most disinterested love for Him.

Our Lord, when showing his Heart to St. Margaret Mary, manifested to her the greatness of his love for men: "Behold the Heart which has loved men so much ..." (Aut. no. 92, p. 103). Such a love naturally demands on our part a return of love, the purest and sincerest love. St. Margaret Mary is inexhaustible on this subject; it pervades all her writings, and one feels at a loss which quotation to choose. *

* See in Part Three the sections on the Spirituality of the Heart of Jesus and the Exigencies of that devotion.

After telling Mother de Saumaise about certain rewards that our Lord would give her for her efforts to print a picture of his Heart, she added :

“Since He wishes you to give Him this pleasure disinterestedly, **purely out of love for Him**, He does not allow me to tell you all that He has in store for you.” (L. 41, p. 306)

In one of her letters to Fr. Croiset, a short while before his ordination to the priesthood, she wrote to him :

“You console me very much when you speak to me of pure love. Christ alone suffices. It seems to me we shall never have time enough to love Him. He is the only object of our love Be completely his, then, forever. **Let yourself be inflamed and consumed with the most pure flames of his love.**” (L. 134, pp. 591-592)

And to Sister de la Barge :

“It is his pure love that makes us do all that pleases Him **May your heart be burning with the flames of pure love.** (L. 100, p. 474)

Of course we may avoid sin in order to go to Heaven, and practise virtue in order to have more merits, but this is not pure love. Pure love, perfect love, focusses itself only on God—it does everything only in order to please Him.

THIS IS THE LOVE WHICH ST. MARGARET MARY TRIES TO INCULCATE.

THIS IS THE LOVE WHICH SHE EXPECTS AS A FRUIT OF THE DEVOTION TO THE HEART OF JESUS.

THIS IS THE LOVE WHICH POPE PIUS XII IN “HAURIETIS AQUAS” STATES AS BELONGING TO THE TRUE NATURE OF THIS DEVOTION.

"It is quite clear that the cult of the Sacred Heart, if we consider its special nature, is a most excellent act of religion, since it demands from us a full and complete surrender and consecration of our hearts to the love of the divine Redeemer, whose wounded Heart is a living sign of his love for us: it is equally clear that this cult and devotion mainly intends that we repay the divine Love with our own love." (A. A. S. vol. XXXXVIII, p. 311)

"Moreover it is certain that the faithful, by rendering this homage to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, are chiefly moved to honour God not on account of some private advantage to body or soul, in the present or eternal life, but are urged by the goodness of God Himself whom they strive to serve, returning Him love for love, adoring Him, rendering Him due thanks" (A. A. S. vol. XXXXVIII, p. 347).

The Holy Father then speaks of those who have misunderstood the devotion to the Heart of Jesus and practise it wrongly, namely, out of excessive self-love and self-interest and clearly states that the main reason for practising this devotion ought not to be sought in the benefits which Christ pledged Himself to grant in the promises.

THESE WORDS OF THE HOLY FATHER CONFIRM WHAT HAS BEEN SAID IN THIS PRESENT STUDY AND SHOULD URGE ALL THOSE WHO SPEAK AND WRITE ABOUT THE PROMISES TO DO IT IN THE WAY WE HAVE EXPLAINED.

PART TWO

A DETAILED STUDY OF EACH PROMISE

I

Three Great General Promises

- 1) **The Promise of Love:** To pour out his love, to set up his reign of love in the hearts of men.
- 2) **The Promise of Mercy:** Saving sinners, withdrawing them from perdition, securing their salvation.
- 3) **The Promise of Graces:** To bestow abundant graces of salvation and sanctification.

The main texts telling us that Christ will give us his love, his mercy, his graces have already been quoted when we spoke of the Designs of our Lord in revealing the devotion to his Heart. (pp. 12-15)

These texts may not be promises in the technical sense of the word. But they are, all the same, very real and authentic, as they are clear manifestations of Christ's will. **Christ Himself states what He means to do through the devotion to his Heart and therefore what He will actually do for those who practise it.**

*ALL THESE TEXTS HAVE BEEN FURTHER ELUCIDATED
BY ST. MARGARET MARY HERSELF.*

Christ will give us his Love

“The zeal you have to make the Sacred Heart known and loved will more and more draw upon your soul the plenitude of his pure love.” (Letter to Mother Dubuysson : L. 116, p. 486)

“Your whole desire must be to love, honour and glorify this divine and most lovable Heart ... Spare neither trouble nor pains for that, for this is the most efficacious means of winning his friendship and drawing abundantly upon yourself and your community graces of sanctification and the reign of his ardent charity. He will pour into your hearts the purity of his holy love.” (Letter to Mother Dubuysson : L. 92, p. 417)

His Mercy

“This divine Heart is an inexhaustible fountain from which three streams are continually flowing. The first is a stream of mercy for sinners upon whom will flow the spirit of contrition and repentance.”

(Letter to Fr. Croiset : L. 132, p. 558)

“Our Lord wishes to withdraw many souls from eternal perdition, because this divine Heart is like a fortress and secure shelter for all poor sinners.”

(Letter to Mother de Saumaise : L. 97, pp. 428-429. Ms. 9)

After speaking about the many sins that are committed and offend God, she adds: “But I hope that this divine Heart will become an inexhaustible fountain of mercy, as it seems to me HE HAS PROMISED to our good Father La Colombiere on the day of his death.” (Same letter, p. 427)

His Graces

“I feel as if I were quite buried in this divine Heart. Unless I am mistaken * I am as though in a bottomless abyss, WHERE HE SHOWS ME TREASURES of love and grace for those who consecrate and sacrifice themselves to Him in order to render Him and procure for Him all the honour, love and glory they can.”

(Letter to Mother de Saumaise : L. 86, p. 396)

* See the correct explanation of this phrase in the Promise concerning the nine First Friday Communions.

“This lovable Heart never ceases to be consumed with love for men. He wants to establish his reign among us anew, only to impart to us more abundantly his graces of sanctification and salvation.”

(Letter to Mother de Saumaise : L. 97, p. 428)

N. B. Though the word “great” was so far applied by authors to the promise concerning the nine First Friday Communions, we have called these three promises (Christ’s love, his mercy, his graces) “Great Promises” because in a way they sum up all the other promises which only flow from them or are particular applications of them.

II

Promise to persons consecrated to the Heart of Jesus

We can easily gather from the writings of St. Margaret Mary that consecration to the Heart of Jesus means consecration to the living Person of Jesus Christ in the radiance of his love, and whose pierced Heart is for us a vivid sign and reminder of that love.

Now besides the general promises mentioned in the preceding section, we find in her writings an explicit promise of salvation for the persons consecrated to his Heart. She speaks of it in two of her letters to Fr. Croiset.

“This divine Heart is more and more disclosing to his unworthy slave its vehement desire of being known, loved and honoured by men ... HE MAKES KNOWN that this desire is so great that HE PROMISES to all those who consecrate themselves to Him and are devoted to Him in order to render Him and procure for Him all the love, honour and glory they possibly can

that He will never allow them to be lost,

that He will be their secure refuge against all the snares of their enemies,

but especially that, at the hour of their death, this divine Heart will receive them lovingly and make their salvation sure."

(L. 131, p. 532)

After saying that she believed that the devotion to his Heart was so agreeable to our Lord that He would use it as a means to withdraw a great number of souls from perdition and place them on the way to salvation, St. Margaret Mary continues :

"It seems to me, HE PROMISED THIS to his unworthy slave, MAKING HER SEE this devotion as one of the last efforts of his love for men, so that, by placing before them the sight of his divine Heart pierced with love for them, He might make their salvation secure, not allowing anyone consecrated to Him to be lost ...

He will be their secure shelter at the hour of death and will receive them and defend them against their enemies."

(L. 132, p. 550)

The word 'enemies' stands for all that opposes our salvation, but primarily Satan; 'snares' means all kinds of temptations. *

Therefore our Lord promises special graces to overcome temptations so as to live and die in his love.

This promise need not astonish us if we understand what is meant by consecration to the Heart of Jesus: **not just a mere formula to be recited, but the total gift of ourselves to Jesus Christ, an irrevocable commitment to Him, made under the sign of his love, under the sign of his Heart. ****

* This is quite clear from several words used by St. Margaret Mary or by our Lord Himself. See Promise XII, the Promise to reign.

** See in Part Three the Section: "The spirituality of the Heart of Jesus as seen in the writings of St. Margaret Mary."

That is why after mentioning this promise, St. Margaret Mary added :

“But, for this they must live conformably to his holy maxims.” *

ST. MARGARET MARY MENTIONS THIS SAME PROMISE IN A SIMPLER FORM IN SEVERAL OF HER LETTERS: L. 35, p. 296; L. 36, p. 300; L. 48, p. 320.

For instance, she wrote to Mother de Saumaise :

“HE GAVE ME TO UNDERSTAND that... He will not allow any to perish who are consecrated to Him in order to give Him all their homage and love with a sincere and resolute will, and get others to do the same, as far as they can.” (L. 100, p. 437)

IN OTHER LETTERS SHE RE-ECHOES THIS PROMISE IN HER OWN WORDS.

To her brother, a priest :

“It seems to me there is no shorter way to reach perfection, no surer means of salvation, than to be wholly consecrated to this divine Heart in order to render Him all the homage of love, honour and praise of which we are capable.” (L. 58, p. 344)

and to her spiritual director :

“It is truly in this Sacred Heart that people will find a place of refuge during the whole of their life, and especially at the hour of death. O, how sweet it is to die, after having had a tender and constant devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus!” (L. 141, p. 628)

* This sentence occurs rather often in her writings.

III

Promise concerning the Picture

OUR LORD EXPLICITLY ASKED FOR PICTURES TO BE MADE.

This is what St. Margaret Mary wrote to Fr. Croiset :

“Our Lord MADE ME UNDERSTAND that the ardent desire He had of being loved by men and of rescuing them from the path of perdition had caused Him to fix upon this plan of manifesting his Heart to men together with all its treasures of love, mercy, grace, sanctification and salvation... so that He might enrich them abundantly and profusely with these divine treasures of the Heart of God which must be honoured under the figure of this Heart of flesh whose image HE WANTED to be publicly exposed and even carried on my person over my heart so that He might imprint his love into it, fill it with all the gifts with which his own is filled, and destroy in it all inordinate affections.” (L. 133, p. 572)

She wrote to Mother de Saumaise :

“I am afraid I did not explain myself clearly enough about the Sacred Heart of our Lord. I think I told you that the picture He wanted you to have made for his glory and your good should be well printed. He desires that you should make pictures of his Sacred Heart so that everyone may be able to buy them according to his devotion ... Have no other motive in doing this work than his glory for which He desires ardently that this devotion should spread and reach all hearts so that He may reign in them absolutely.” (L. 44, p. 311)

HERE IS OUR LORD'S PROMISE CONCERNING THE PICTURE.

It is found in several of her letters, nearly word for word. We give here the text from a letter to Fr. Croiset :

*"This divine Heart is more and more disclosing to his unworthy slave its vehement desire of being known, loved and honoured by men... He makes known that this desire is so great that HE PROMISES that **

and that, as He is the source of all blessings, He will abundantly pour these out on all the places where the image of his Sacred Heart will be honoured, because his love urges Him to bestow the inexhaustible riches of his sanctifying and salutary graces upon souls that are of good will." (L. 131, p. 532)

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As regards the saint, we know how much trouble she took to have pictures made and distributed. Several of her letters are concerned with this subject.

She wrote to Mother de Saumaise :

"I would be glad to know whether you will be able to have a copper plate made for printing pictures of the Sacred Heart of our good Master. He has chosen you for that. He has made this very clear to me... I think it to be the will of this divine Heart..."

He wishes this, so that all those who want to render his Sacred Heart some special honour may have pictures of It in their houses, and also smaller ones to wear on them." (L. 41, pp. 305-306, A, B.)

And to Mother de Soudeilles :

"I send you two pictures of the Sacred Heart. You may place the bigger one at the foot of your crucifix or in another place, there to be honoured ; as to the smaller one, wear it on yourself along with the short consecration." (L. 52, p. 328)

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* St. Margaret Mary mentions here the promise to persons consecrated to Him (see pp. 26-27)

On the other hand St. Margaret Mary speaks of Satan's effort to prevent this work and so to frustrate our Lord's desire to have pictures made.

She wrote to Mother de Saumaise :

"It seems to me that the devil is extremely afraid lest this good work should succeed because of the glory it will give to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and because of the salvation of many souls, a salvation brought about by this devotion in those who consecrate themselves to Him, in order to love, honour and glorify Him." (L. 49, p. 346)

In fact nearly insurmountable difficulties presented themselves when it was question of printing the first pictures. It looked as if the whole of Hell were let loose to prevent this work. Many attempts failed and the work was postponed for several years. Yet St. Margaret Mary persevered, knowing that our Lord greatly desired this, and finally she succeeded in having the pictures printed and circulated.

WHY DID OUR LORD ASK THAT PICTURES BE MADE ?

It is because He knows well our human nature and the great influence pictures have on us. He chose his pierced Heart as the sign of his love, and so He naturally wanted pictures of It to be made, so that they may remind us of Him, of his presence, and above all, of his love, and so draw us to love Him in return.

In her letter to Mother de Saumaise, the saint is very explicit about this :

"HE PROMISED ... that, as He is the source of all blessings, He would pour these out abundantly on all places where the image of his lovable Heart was exposed, so that THERE He might be loved and honoured (*pour Y etre aime et honore*).'' (L. 35, p. 296)

Truly, pictures are an excellent means of entering into a living and loving communication with Christ. Quite naturally then will He pour his graces and blessings on all the places where his picture is exposed, and He is loved and honoured.

Honour, however, does not mean that we just hang up a picture on a wall and leave it at that. It implies that on seeing the picture we turn with our love, our praises, our thanksgiving, our prayers towards Him whom the picture represents. It means above all that we make sincere efforts to please Him and to lead our lives according to the wishes of his Heart.

That is why immediately after mentioning the promise of our Lord, St. Margaret Mary adds: "**He is looking for empty hearts**, devoid of self-love, to fill them with the gentle unction of his ardent charity, so as to transform them entirely into Himself. **He is seeking humble and submissive souls** that want nothing but the accomplishment of his good pleasure." (L. 131, p. 532)

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When He speaks of the graces and blessings He will pour on all the places where a picture of his Heart is honoured, it is clear from the very designs our Lord had in manifesting this devotion, that He meant primarily **spiritual blessings**.

But He who spoke so feelingly of the Heavenly Father who knows all our needs and takes loving care of each one of us, He who, in the goodness of his Heart, cured the sick, fed the hungry crowd, consoled the widow of Naim, and called to Himself all those who were overburdened in order to give them relief, will surely give us all the temporal helps that we require and are good for us, unless He judges that the privation of these (namely a cross) is still better for us,

because it is required either for our eternal salvation or at least for our greater sanctification, namely, growth in his love, and so, increase of eternal bliss for us.

It is in this light that we must understand the words of St. Margaret Mary :

“They will find in this lovable devotion all the helps necessary for their state of life, namely, peace in their families, relief in their work, the blessings of Heaven on all their undertakings, consolation in their afflictions.” (L. 141, p. 627)

Here it may be good to remark that the picture is, as Fr. Croiset wrote in his version of a letter of St. Margaret Mary (L. 133, p. 573), “a means to touch the indifferent hearts of men,” namely, to move them to love Christ, and so it must be adapted to the character and tastes of different people. Some may like a vivid representation of the heart; others may prefer a more discreet representation, even a mere suggestion of the heart.

We may even understand that certain intellectual temperaments may have a true devotion to the Heart of Jesus without any exterior representation of It. After all, such was the case of several saints who had been living before the time of St. Margaret Mary.

Whatever it be, the picture should be such that it draws people to a greater devotion to and love for our Lord.

IV

Promises to Families*HERE IS THE TEXT*

"The Sacred Heart of Jesus made it known to me again that the pleasure He takes in being loved, known and honoured by his creatures is so great that HE PROMISES"

that, as He is the source of all blessings, He will pour them abundantly on all the places where the image of his Heart will be set up and honoured ;

and that He will reunite divided families

and protect and assist all those that are in any necessity and approach Him with confidence."

(Letter to Mother Greyfie : L. 36, p. 300)

The same promises of our Lord concerning families are also found in a letter to Fr. Croiset (L. 131, p. 532), to Sister des Escures (L. 48, p. 320), to Mother de Saumaise (L. 35, p. 296).

IN HER TURN ST. MARGARET MARY CONFIRMED THESE PROMISES.

She wrote to her spiritual director :

"As regards the laity, they will find through this lovable devotion all the helps necessary for their state in life, namely, peace in their families..." (L. 141, p. 627)

Her elder brother with his family took to the devotion to the Sacred Heart. He even had a chapel built in his honour. St. Margaret Mary wrote about the family :

“ You would scarcely believe the change that this divine Heart has wrought in that family.” (L. 105 to Mother de Saumaise, p. 452)

We may note that in all these letters our Lord's promises to the families follow immediately the promise made to those who would honour his picture. **Thus it seems that the place where our Lord chiefly wanted to be honoured and loved is the family.**

All we have explained concerning the graces and blessings that our Lord will bestow on the places where the picture of his Heart will be honoured, applies with still greater reason to the families, especially when, as our Lord says, they approach Him with confidence. (L. 36, p. 300)

These two promises have given rise to the family consecration to the Heart of Jesus (or the enthronement) by which the family chooses Christ as its King and Master and pledges to Him an everlasting love and fidelity. This implies that the members of the family will try their best to make Christ happy in their home by putting into practice the great law of love He Himself gave us (love for God, love for the neighbour).

This dedication of the family to Christ has done incalculable good to all those who have made it. Countless families can bear witness to the many great spiritual blessings, special protection and even helps in their temporal needs, which this dedication to Christ has brought with it.

V

Promises to Religious Communities

St. Margaret Mary wrote to Fr. Croiset :

"The Sacred Heart of Jesus has again made known to me that his desire of being known, loved and honoured by men is so great that HE PROMISES

that He would pour out the sweet unction of his ardent charity on all the communities which would honour Him and place themselves under his special protection,

and that He would keep all their hearts united so as to make them one with his, (L. 131, p. 532)

Basing herself on those promises, St. Margaret Mary wrote to her spiritual director :

"Strive above all, that religious persons may embrace this devotion, for they will obtain through it so many helps that no other means would be necessary to establish the first fervour and the most exact regularity in the least well-regulated communities and to bring to the highest perfection those that already live in great regularity."

(L. 141, pp, 626-627)

VI

Promises concerning the Apostolate

St. Margaret Mary wrote to Fr. Croiset :

"To all those who will consecrate themselves to Him and will be devoted to Him... HE PROMISES"*

In so far as they will take trouble to increase the reign of his love in hearts, so will this divine Heart take care to sanctify them and make them great before his Heavenly Father." (L. 131, P. 532)

To Sister Joly :

"The adorable Heart of Jesus wants to set up his reign of love in the hearts of all and destroy that of Satan. It seems to me that He has so great a desire of doing this that HE PROMISES great rewards to men of good will who work for it with all their heart according to the strength and lights He gives them." (L. 118, p. 489)

To her spiritual director :

"My divine Master HAS MADE KNOWN TO ME that those who labour for the salvation of souls, shall be successful in their labours and shall have the art of touching the most hardened hearts, if they have a tender devotion to his Heart and if they labour to inspire everyone with it and to establish it everywhere." (L. 141, p. 628)

St. Margaret Mary, after having heard the magnificent promises our Lord made to those who would spread the devotion to his Heart, speaks often on this topic in her letters with a view to encourage her correspondents to work for the spread of the devotion, by showing them its great apostolic and pastoral value.

Thus she wrote to Fr. Croiset :

"There is nothing gentler and sweeter and at the same time stronger and more efficacious than the sweet unction of the burning love of the Heart of Jesus to convert the most

* St. Margaret Mary mentions here the promise to persons consecrated to Him (see pp. 26-27).

hardened souls and to touch the most callous hearts. He will make the words of his preachers and faithful friends like a burning sword that will cause the most icy hearts to melt with love." (L. 132, p. 557)

To Mother de Saumaise :

"Go on courageously with the work you have undertaken for the glory of the Sacred Heart and the establishment of his reign... He will have an eternal remembrance and gratitude for all that you are doing for Him... You will find yourself well-rewarded for it, were it only for the great number of souls He shall have drawn from perdition by this means." (L. 97, p. 429)

And to Sister Joly :

How indebted we are to this divine Heart for deigning to make use of us to carry out his plan (the spread of the devotion) ! He reserves treasures of grace for all those who work for this as much as He enables them to do." (L. 108, p. 463)

Important Remark

Naturally these promises are not to be taken out of the whole economy of Salvation—an economy which, to a great extent, remains hidden from us, and in which the fruits of our apostolic works are often unknown to us, an economy which always respects the free will of men, and generally does not precipitate things and is not spectacular.

Neither do these promises do away with the many crosses, difficulties and hardships inherent in the work of apostolate. Christ saved the world through the Cross, and it is by this way that we too have to save it.

But the promises certainly imply very special great graces on the work of apostolate of those who try their best to spread the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DONE SO CAN TESTIFY TO THIS.

“The devotion to the Heart of Christ, understood in its all-embracing manner, is a powerful means of apostolate, almost a charismatic one, as the promises of Paray-le-Monial reveal it.”(G. de Becker, in ‘Divinitas’, year 1968, pp. 184-187)

VII

Promise to those who celebrate the Feast of the Heart of Jesus

This is what St. Margaret Mary wrote in her Autobiography:

Then discovering to me his divine Heart, He said:

“Behold this Heart, which has so loved men that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to give them proofs of its love; and in return I receive from the greater number of them nothing but ingratitude by reason of their irreverence and sacrileges, and by the coldness and contempt which they show Me in this Sacrament of Love. But what I feel the most keenly is that it is hearts which are consecrated to Me, that treat Me thus.

... Therefore I ask of you that the Friday after the octave of the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament be kept as a special Feast in honour of my Heart, by receiving communion on that day and making to my Heart a reparation of honour for all the unworthy treatments It has received during the time that It has been exposed on the altars.

I PROMISE YOU that my Heart shall shed in abundance the influence of its divine love on all those who shall thus honour It, and cause It to be so honoured.” (Aut. no. 92, p. 103)

We may here note the Eucharistic character of the Feast to be celebrated. (See the promise concerning the nine First Friday Communions, p. 43)

VIII

Promise

**that the Heart of Jesus will be for us
a Fountain of Living Water and a Furnace of Love**

Technically speaking, we may perhaps not call this a formal promise, and yet what our Lord states is really equivalent to a promise.

“One day He appeared to me covered with wounds and TOLD ME TO LOOK AT THE OPENING OF HIS SACRED SIDE which was a bottomless abyss made by a spear beyond all measure, the spear of love...”

It was in this abyss that I had to disappear. It was the dwelling place of all his friends, wherein they would find two lives: one for the soul and one for the heart.

The soul finds in it **the spring of living water** to purify itself and receive the life of grace of which sin had deprived it. The heart finds in it a **burning furnace of love** which lets it live only through love... But as its entrance is small, one has to be small and devoid of everything to enter into it.”

(Writings to Mother de Saumaise, no. 22, p. 143)

IX

Promise of the Cross

We might call this the “**Forgotten Promise**” as no author treating of the promises of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary seems to mention it.

And yet already in the Gospel Jesus made this promise to his disciples: “In the world you will have tribulations” (Jn. 16: 33).

St. Margaret Mary wrote to her former superior, Mother Greyfie :

“ It seems to me that our Lord made me see several names written in his Sacred Heart owing to their desire to cause It to be honoured...

But HE DOES NOT say that his friends would have nothing to suffer because HE WISHES that they make all their happiness consist in tasting his sorrows.” (L. 39, p. 303)

Though this text does not contain the word ‘ Promise ’ it implies on the part of our Lord a clear affirmation that we shall meet with the cross.

OUR LORD EXPLAINED THIS FURTHER TO ST. MARGARET MARY :

“ Embrace the cross lovingly, whenever it comes, as the most precious token of love I can give you in this life.”

(Writings to Mother de Saumaise, no. 44, p. 154)

Truly, the cross is a sign of Christ’s special love for us because it is a participation in his own cross in which alone we ought to glory (Gal. 6 : 14).

St. Margaret Mary wrote in the same way to Mother Greyfie:

“ Our Lord has never given us stronger proofs that He loves us than by making us share in his sufferings.” (L. 119, p. 492)

And to Fr. Croiset :

“ I was consoled at hearing that you are suffering. This confirms me all the more that you are amongst the well-beloved of our divine Master.” (L. 136, p. 607)

X

Promise to Faith

Though the following sentences were said in a particular case to St. Margaret Mary concerning herself, their contents and even their style are so evangelical * that we may reasonably take them as addressed to all.

“When I placed before our Lord my little petitions regarding those things which seemed to me difficult to obtain (concerning the devotion to his Heart), it seemed to me I heard these words :

‘Do you believe that I can do this? If you believe it, you will see the power of my Heart in the magnificence of my love.’

And as I watch its steady progress, I hear these other words :

‘Did I not indeed tell you that, if you could believe, you would see all your desires accomplished?’ ”

(Letter to Mother de Saumaise : L. 97, p. 429)

- * Mt. 17 : 19. If you have faith,... nothing will be impossible to you.
- Mt. 21 : 21. Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith.
- Mt. 9 : 28. Do you believe that I can do this?
- Mk. 9 : 22. If you can believe! All things are possible to him who believes.
- Jn. 11 : 40. Did I not tell you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?

XI

Promise**concerning the Nine First Friday Communions**

A) TEXTUAL AUTHENTICITY

Here is the text. It is taken from a letter to Mother de Saumaise, her former superior with whom St. Margaret Mary felt very much at home. Had not our Lord Himself told the saint she should speak with her simply and quite openly, as a good daughter to a good mother? (L. 59, p. 346)

One Friday during Holy Communion, unless she is mistaken, He spoke these words to his unworthy slave :

"I PROMISE you, in the excessive mercy of my Heart, that its all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month, the grace of final repentance. They will not die in my disfavour nor without receiving their sacraments. My divine Heart shall be their secure refuge in their last moments."

And then, St. Margaret Mary goes on :

"He has, moreover, promised his unworthy slave that, if she gives herself over completely to loving Him, He Himself will pray to his Father for those who recommend themselves to her prayers. How can I ever enumerate, my dear Mother, all the mercies of this loving Heart? Notwithstanding my ingratitude, He has never shown me greater or more wonderful ones. I consider myself nothing but an obstacle to the furthering of his glory and to the imparting of his graces to souls because of the tepid life I lead." (L. 86, pp. 397-398)

This promise (along with the promise to reign) is the only one in the writings of St. Margaret Mary which she reports in the direct speech, giving the very words our Lord used. On the mere reading of this text along with the one which follows,

one feels that it is genuine. Yet some authors have denied its authenticity.

1) They say that we do not possess the original of the letter written by St. Margaret Mary.

This is true; out of the 141 letters of St. Margaret Mary, we possess only 43 originals. But the letter is found in Manuscript 6 which contains letters “copied from the original”. (See the learned study made on this subject by Mgr. Gauthey in the introduction to the letters, *Vie et Oeuvres*, vol. II, p. 226). Besides, if only texts of which we possess the original were to be considered authentic, we should have to declare nearly the whole Bible unauthentic.

2) Others say that the promise was unknown until the second half of the nineteenth century.

a) True, preachers did not speak about this promise until that time, but this proves nothing against its authenticity. To say that it was ignored is completely false. It is found word for word in the “*Memoire des Contemporaines*”, a life of St. Margaret Mary written immediately after her death by two Sisters who had been her novices (*Vie et Oeuvres*, vol. I, no. 277, p. 261). The original of this *Memoire* is still kept in the archives of the monastery of the Visitation.

In fact, no list of promises whatsoever was published before 1863 (one year previous to the beatification of Margaret Mary). The list then drawn up, (the tabular form) did not include the Promise, but it was already inserted in the list of authentic promises published in 1881 with the permission of the Bishop of Autun, Adolph Louis Perraud.

It is also found in the first two editions of the life of St. Margaret Mary published in 1867 and 1876 by the Sisters of the Visitation of that time. Besides, it had already been preached orally by a mission band in Belgium in 1866 and by Fr. Franciosi, s. j., in Italy in 1869.

3) Others bring forward against its authenticity “ its failure to perform.”

They say that, according to the promise, no one who makes the nine First Friday Communions would die without the last sacraments. Now, persons who made these nine First Friday Communions have, as a matter of fact, died very suddenly without any sacraments at all.

Answer

The promise gives no assurance whatever that certain individuals will not die without what was termed “ the last sacraments ”. All that it says is that they shall not die without “ their sacraments ”. “ Ils ne mourront point... sans recevoir leurs sacrements.” The French phrase ‘ leurs sacrements ’ is not used by any French writer in the sense of “ the last sacraments ”.

This phrase must be interpreted in connection with the object of the promise: “ The grace of final repentance ”. The fundamental idea of the promise is death in God’s friendship. And it is this that our Lord essentially promises, of course along with the reception of the sacraments if these were really needed to restore that friendship.

Common sense alone tells us that our Lord would never make a promise to the effect that all who had made the nine First Friday Communions would make their confession, and receive communion and the sacrament of the sick just before their death.

4) Another objection : St. Margaret Mary was not sure of this promise herself.

She prefaces it with the words, “ If I am not mistaken ”. Besides, she herself was in doubt regarding the genuineness of her revelations. She constantly uses such phrases as “ It seems to me ”, “ If I am not mistaken,” etc.

Answer

It is true, in the writings of St. Margaret Mary such expressions are rather common. The explanation of it is very simple. This manner of speech had been enjoined on her by her superior, Mother Greyfie, to keep her humble, as we learn from the superior herself. This is what Mother Greyfie wrote in her Memoire: "I told her not to speak of these extraordinary graces which she received except by using terms of doubt, such as, 'It seems to me' or 'If I am not mistaken'." (*Vie et Oeuvres*, vol. I, p. 130)

How obedient Margaret Mary was to these injunctions may be judged from the remark of Mother Greyfie: "She always appeared to me to be most faithful to this advice." (*Vie et Oeuvres*, vol. I, p. 130)

These expressions, therefore, do not imply any doubt on the part of St. Margaret Mary, but only show her spirit of obedience.

Even apart from any suggestions on the part of her directors or superiors, Margaret Mary's humility led her to adopt in general, as is evident from her writings, a very diffident tone in speaking of the favours bestowed on her by God. In this very fact we find, if anything, a further proof of the genuineness of the favours she received from our Lord.

B) THEOLOGICAL SOUNDNESS

Some bring forward theological objections against the Promise.

- 1) **They say that according to the Council of Trent, no one can be certain of his salvation.**

The Council (Sess. VI, Cap. 12, Canons 15, 23, 16) excludes only an absolute certainty, but we surely can have a kind of moral certitude about our salvation. Does not the very act of hope we recite expect that of us? The Church herself makes us pray in her liturgy: "Strengthen in our hearts our faith and the hope of salvation"—*Confirma in cordibus nostris fiduciam et spem salutis.* (*Liturgia Horarum I, p. 418*)

- 2) **They say again that the promise implies that the only requirement to be saved, is to make the nine First Friday Communions.**

This is utterly false. The promise does not mean an easy, couchy way to go to Heaven. There is only one way to Heaven and that is the way of the cross: To love God above all, to keep Christ's law in its entirety. Now all this implies many sacrifices and painful efforts, detachment and renunciation, many crosses and trials. But our Lord has promised to those who make the nine First Friday Communions special graces which will give them the generosity to do the necessary sacrifices required for salvation.

N. B. What we have said here applies equally well to all the promises of our Lord in the Gospel, where He seems to attach salvation to one single point: "Blessed are the pure, for they shall see God."—"Forgive and you shall be forgiven."

The Bull of canonization of St. Margaret Mary, from the beginning, speaks, in a wholly decided way, of how the Lord manifested Himself many times to the Servant of God, Margaret Mary, and spoke with her on various occasions with supreme benignity in order to arouse love and devotion for his Sacred Heart... (A. A. S. vol. XII, 1920, p. 487). The Bull goes on to give a careful account of our Lord's communications to the saint; it even uses Margaret Mary's own words, especially those referring in detail to the request for a liturgical feast of the Heart of Jesus (p. 490-494) and then quotes WORD FOR WORD the promise our Lord made concerning the Communion on nine First Fridays (pp. 503).

The fact that the Pope quoted the promise in the Bull of canonization of St. Margaret Mary is a clear indication of its theological soundness.

C) PASTORAL USEFULNESS

Some authors object to the promise on pastoral grounds.

They fear that some people might make the nine First Friday Communions in order to lead afterwards just any kind of life they like.

This is a groundless fear, and no one will even dream of doing such a foolish thing. If anyone did, such communions would be of no avail as he would not be genuinely resolved to avoid sins.

Others say that after people have sincerely made the nine First Friday Communions, later on the temptation may occur to them: "I am sure to be saved, therefore I may do whatever I like."

This too is very unreal; experience shows that our good Christians have enough common sense not to reason in that way. Besides, the promise of our Lord precisely implies the grace not to yield to such a temptation.

It is true, very sincere Christians, after having made the nine First Friday Communions well, may, owing to weakness, fall away from their good dispositions and yield to serious sins. But it is to these that our Lord has promised to give the grace of true repentance.

To say, therefore, that the promise is an encouragement to sin, or an occasion of sinning by presumption on God's mercy, is false.

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To understand the pastoral utility of this promise, we must realize that devotion to the Sacred Heart is essentially Eucharistic.

The main apparitions took place when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar or after communion. Our Lord complained in a special way about the ingratitude of men for the institution of the Eucharist, about their sins of irreverence and coldness. He asked for a Feast in honour of his Heart chiefly as a solemn reparation for these sins, and so He wanted it to take place after the Feast of his Body and Blood. He asked St. Margaret Mary to communicate as often as her superior would allow her, and especially to receive communion on the First Friday of each month. He told St. Margaret Mary: "I thirst and with so burning a thirst to be loved by men in the Blessed Sacrament that this thirst consumes me" (L. 133, p. 580).

It is this Eucharistic aspect of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus that Pope Paul VI stressed in his apostolic letter 'Investigabiles divitias Christi'.

We desire above all that the Heart of Jesus be honoured by a more intense participation in the Sacrament of the altar, since its greatest gift is the Eucharist. In the eucharistic sacrifice where He immolates Himself, we receive our Saviour 'always interceding for us' (Hebr. 7:25), Him whose Heart was opened by the soldier's lance and who poured out upon mankind the floods of his precious blood mixed with water... ..

The cult of the Sacred Heart should be considered by all as a noble and worthy form of that authentic piety which today, particularly after the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, we should foster towards the person of Jesus Christ... ..

This form of devotion seems to impose itself in a particular way. For, as mentioned above, it consists essentially in worthily adoring Jesus Christ and offering Him reparation; it is based above all on the sacred mystery of the Eucharist from which, as from all other liturgical actions, flow 'the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as towards their end' (Cons. Lit. no. 10).

A. A. S. Vol. LVII, pp. 300, 301)

It is in this light that the promise our Lord made to St. Margaret Mary concerning those who would receive Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays is to be understood.

Nay more, it is to be understood in the light of the Gospel. Christ's discourse on the Bread of Life, his instituting the Holy Eucharist, clearly show the great desire He has that we take part in the Eucharistic meal prepared for us by Him. That is why He has promised life eternal to those who would do so: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have life eternal" (Jn. 6: 64).

Now the promise of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary is just a timely, forceful reminder of Christ's desire as manifested in the Gospel that we partake of the Eucharist, and

also a new expression of the promise of eternal life He made in this connection.

Let us explain this promise to the faithful in this way, urging them not only to receive Holy Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays but on every First Friday, out of love for our Lord, to fulfil his burning desire that we share in his Eucharistic banquet, that we receive Him into our hearts.*

It is clear then that this promise is not an encouragement to tepidity but a great help to lead a more fervent life, as it strikingly expresses the ardent wish of our Lord that we participate in his eucharistic banquet and so urges us on to give Him that pleasure.

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Let every First Friday become a kind of monthly recollection centring on Christ's love where we renew our personal attachment to Him by fulfilling his two great wishes

—that we become more united in love with Him by Holy Communion

—and more united with our brethren by the practice of fraternal love.

Indeed there is a close, intimate theological connection between the Eucharist and fraternal love, but we have to actualize it in our concrete lives. We suggest, therefore, that the faithful be taught to make greater efforts to practise fraternal love on the First Friday of every month, v. g. by speaking

* That is why it might be better that we do not make the faithful count the First Fridays nor distribute sheets on which they mark the nine Fridays.

in a friendly way to those who have offended them, and especially by doing something for the poor, such as giving them the collection of that day.

That is why, to crown this study on the promise concerning Communion, we shall add in the third part a section on love for the poor, as found in the writings of St. Margaret Mary.

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XII

The Promise to Reign

We have placed this promise in the last place as, so to say, it is the crown of them all and is a kind of guarantee of their fulfilment.

ST. MARGARET MARY WROTE IN HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

“ I did not know to whom to address myself in my affliction except to Himself (the Sacred Heart) who always kept up my failing courage by telling me continuously :

‘ Do not fear, I shall reign in spite of my enemies and of all those who would oppose it.’

This consoled me greatly as I only desired to see Him reign.” (no. 95, p. 105)

SHE WROTE TO SISTER JOLY:

“ When Satan was stirring up all kinds of difficulties and opposition which in the beginning were greater than I can tell, our Lord in his goodness restored my courage and gave me unshakable confidence, reassuring me with these loving words :

'What are you afraid of? I shall reign in spite of Satan and all opposition'." (L. 108, p. 465)

St. Margaret Mary seems to have attached rather great importance to this promise. At least twice she quotes it in the direct speech, something unique in her writings. All other promises (with the exception of the one concerning the First Friday Communions) are reported only in the indirect speech.

Besides, several times the saint repeats in her own name the very words of our Lord.

*"He will reign, this lovable Heart, in spite of Satan.
This fills me with joy and consolation."*

(Letter to Mother de Saumaise : L. 100, p. 436)

*"He will reign, this divine Heart,
in spite of all those who would oppose Him.
Satan and all his followers will be confounded."*

(Letter to Sister Joly : L. 118, p. 489)

"Yes, we must love Him ... and He will reign in spite of all his enemies and their opposition."

(Letter to Mother de Saumaise : L. 87, p. 402)

The words of Christ to her "I shall reign" must have reminded her of the words in the Gospel: Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (Jn. 16:33)

PART THREE

ADDITIONAL STUDIES FOR A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE DEVOTION TO THE HEART OF JESUS
AND
OF THE PROMISES

I

**The Spirituality of the Heart of Jesus
as seen in the writings of St. Margaret Mary**

Many think that devotion to the Heart of Jesus is chiefly made up of exterior practices, and consists mainly in exercises of piety. But this is not so.

Already Pope Pius XII affirmed in 'Haurietis Aquas':

"Everybody must be firmly convinced that in the devotion to the most august Heart of Jesus, the external acts of piety by no means have the first and better part." (A. A. S. vol. XXXXVIII, p. 347)

Devotion to the Heart of Jesus, according to St. Margaret Mary, consists primarily in a life wholly united with Jesus, so as to feel what He feels, to will what He wills, to love what He loves, to do what pleases Him most; it is a life entirely filled with Christ's love so that Christ becomes for us all in all; it is a life which is a permanent return of love to Christ's love.

Time and again, St. Margaret Mary speaks of being consecrated and devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and rendering Him all the love, honour and glory we can. But in no way does she mean by this mere exercises of piety. Let us see how she herself explains consecration and devotedness to the Heart of Jesus.

SHE WROTE TO MOTHER DE SAUMAISE, HER FORMER SUPERIOR:

“ If you desire to live wholly for our Lord Jesus Christ and to reach the perfection that He desires from you, **you must make to his Sacred Heart the entire sacrifice of yourself and of all that you have, without any reserve, so that you may no longer will anything except with the will of this lovable Heart, love nothing except with its love.**

Act only according to the lights He gives you ; undertake nothing without first asking his counsel and his help. Give unto Him the glory of all, thank Him in the same way for the failure of your undertakings as for their success, remaining always satisfied without ever giving way to anxiety.”
(L. 28, pp. 281-282)

SHE WROTE TO SISTER DE LA BARGE:

“ This, then, is the time, dear friend, when it is necessary for us to be completely consumed, incessantly, in this burning furnace of the Sacred Heart of our adorable Master, whence we must never depart. **And after we have lost our sinful heart in these divine flames of pure love, we must take from out of them a completely new heart that will make us henceforth live an altogether new life,** with thoughts and affections altogether new, and that will make us do all our actions with dispositions entirely new in purity and fervour.

There must remain no longer anything of ourselves, but this divine Heart of Jesus must take the place of our own so completely that our Lord alone will live and act within us and for us. **Our will must be so completely taken up by his that He may be able to act in us without any resistance on our part. The affections, thoughts, and desires of the Heart of Jesus, but above all, its love must take the place of ours.** It is then that his love will love Himself in us and for us. And thus this lovable Heart being all things to us in everything, we shall be able to say with St. Paul that we no longer live, but that it is Christ who lives in us ...

It seems to me that we should no longer breathe forth anything but flames of pure love, a crucifying love, **a love that is completely sacrificed by a continual immolation of ourselves to the divine good pleasure, so that it may be perfectly accomplished in us. On our part we must be contented with loving Him and letting Him do with us as He pleases.** Whether He casts us down or lifts us up, whether He consoles us or afflicts us, all this must be indifferent to us. Provided He is pleased, that must suffice for us." (L. 110, p. 472-473) *

Are not these words of St. Margaret Mary a most beautiful commentary of the words of St. Paul:

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

(Gal. 2: 20)

Clearly then, devotion to the Heart of Jesus, according to St. Margaret Mary, does not consist chiefly in some devotional practices but implies that we love Jesus above everything else, sincerely seek his glory alone, faithfully try to do his will in everything, and make our hearts like unto his.

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But what we have said here about the external acts of piety is in no way to minimize the absolute necessity and great importance of prayer to keep and increase our union with Christ. Nor does it detract from **the great spiritual value of certain practices of piety recommended by our Lord Himself** to St. Margaret Mary, such as frequent communion and the Holy Hour.

Participating in the Eucharist cannot be called just "a practice of piety" as the Eucharist is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life (Vat. II, The Church II: 11; see also Liturgy I: 10; II: 55).

* Similar such statements are found in many of her letters. For longer passages, see also the letter to Mere de Soudeilles (L. 28, p. 282), the letter to her brother, a priest (L. 58, p. 344).

As for meditating on Christ's agony and uniting ourselves with Him, it is a form of contemplative prayer which greatly fosters our intimacy with Him.

As regards the prayer of reparation to be offered to our Lord on the Feast of his Heart, if we explain to the people that, as 'Haurietis Aquas' says, the Eucharist is the gift of the Heart of Jesus and his Heart was beating with love at the moment of instituting it (A. A. S. vol. XXXXVIII, p. 331) and that, as Jesus told St. Margaret Mary (Aut. no. 92, p. 103), He receives in it nothing but ingratitude, coldness and contempt, who would not feel that we have to show Him some special marks of love in this very sacrifice and sacrament of love?

Again, in order to keep ourselves united with Christ during the day, most useful are some short invocations that sprung from the devotion, like "Sacred Heart of Jesus burning with love for us, inflame our hearts with love for You."—"Jesus meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto Yours"—"Heart of Jesus, I trust in You."

II

The Exigencies of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus according to St. Margaret Mary

Here are some texts which show the exigencies of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus according to St. Margaret Mary and the solidity of her spiritual directions. All the texts except the first are bits of advice she gave to her own novices, and so are of great importance as they show us how she trained them in the spiritual life. (Avis Particuliers, pp. 641-717)

I beg our Lord with all my heart to make you ever faithful to what He asks of you, ready to sacrifice to Him all that costs you most, according as He makes his will known to you; for there is no middle course; He will have all or nothing. (L. 75, p. 373)

Do not deceive yourself; you will obtain nothing except at the very point of the sword. That is to say, you must do violence to self, and be of the number of those who take Heaven by storm. (p. 674)

Practise abandonment as regards your body, taking and accepting indifferently sickness or health, work or rest; abandonment as regards your soul, accepting dryness and desolation with the same thanksgiving with which you would accept sweetness and consolation. (p. 691)

Take as your motto and aspiration in every event and frame of mind, these words of our Lord: "Your will be done!" adding "My God, I abandon myself to You." (p. 689)

You will not be able to do anything more pleasing to our Lord or better calculated to win his friendship than to accept joyfully all the little humiliations that will happen to you. (p. 675)

You must be very careful to profit by the occasions of mortifications and humiliations that come in your way, not avoiding nor shunning them, for they are the principal means of uniting yourself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. (p. 701)

Be meek and charitable especially to those for whom you feel some antipathy. Be more cordial and condescending with them than with others. (p. 673)

Be humble towards God and gentle with your neighbour. Judge and accuse no one but yourself and always excuse others. (p. 708)

In dealing with your neighbour conform as closely as possible to the humility and gentleness of the Heart of Jesus ... love those who humble and contradict you. (p. 673)

In your dealings with your neighbour be always humble, joyful, kind and gracious in your manner. (p. 666)

Finally here are two resolutions included in the vow of perfection which St. Margaret Mary took on the 31st of October during her retreat of 1686 :

"I shall look upon all those who afflict me or speak ill of me as my best friends, trying to do them the greatest good possible and render to them all the services I can." (p. 201)

"I shall never enquire about the faults of others and if I am obliged to speak about them, I shall do so with that charity with which the Heart of Jesus is animated." (p. 201)

We may note here that these texts show the great place that fraternal charity held in the training she gave her novices.

III

**Three Requests of our Lord
to St. Margaret Mary concerning Communion**

1

Our Lord asked St. Margaret Mary to communicate often.

“First you shall receive me in the Blessed Sacrament as OFTEN as obedience will allow you.”

(Autobiography, no. 56, p. 73)

2

**Our Lord explicitly asked her
to communicate on the First Friday of every month.**

“Besides, you shall communicate on the First Friday of every month.”

(Autobiography, no. 56, p. 73)

(Letter to Fr. Croiset : L. 133, p. 580)

3

**Our Lord asked St. Margaret Mary
to receive Holy Communion on every First Friday
in reparation for the sins committed against the Holy Eucharist.**

SHE WROTE TO FR. CROISSET:

“Our Lord showed me in his adorable Heart two kinds of holiness : the holiness of love and the holiness of justice.”

Then she explained how the holiness of justice was for her a cause of great sufferings, and she went on to say :

" But the holiness of love is scarcely less painful in its own way ; but THESE SUFFERINGS ARE TO MAKE REPARATION, IN SOME WAY, FOR THE INGRATITUDE OF SO MANY HEARTS WHO DO NOT MAKE ANY RETURN FOR THE BURNING LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE DIVINE SACRAMENT OF LOVE ... "

Then the saint added :

" It was then shown to me how these two kinds of holiness would make me suffer I would not be able to bear these sufferings, if He did not sustain me with a powerful grace, and that is why HE ORDERED ME TO RECEIVE COMMUNION ON THE FIRST FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH or rather IN ORDER TO MAKE REPARATION FOR ALL THE OUTRAGES HE HAS RECEIVED DURING THE MONTH IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT."

(Letter 133, pp. 578-580)

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It is true that the requests of our Lord to receive communion frequently and especially on every First Friday of the month in a spirit of gratitude for the Holy Eucharist and of reparation for the sins committed against it, were directly addressed to St. Margaret Mary. But from the context we may say that our Lord addressed them to all of us, not as a command but as our privilege of love.

Many Christians spontaneously understood them in that way. So too did the Church and the Popes in as much as they confirmed the doctrine contained in these requests.

St. Pius X

He issued the decree 'Quam singulari', re-establishing the practice of frequent and even daily Communion. (A practice which did not exist in the time of St. Margaret Mary, even in the monasteries where daily Mass was celebrated.)

Pius XI

In his encyclical 'Most Merciful Redeemer,' after speaking of Christ's love for men and of the ingratitude they showed Him by their sins, the Pope continued :

"In order that these sins might be washed away, He recommended several things to be done, and in particular the following as most pleasing to Himself, namely, that men should approach the Altar on the First Friday of every month with the purpose of expiating sin, making what is called a Communion of Reparation, and they should likewise make expiatory supplications and prayers, prolonged for a whole hour,—which is rightly called the 'Holy Hour'."

(*Miserentissimus Redemptor*, May 8, 1928—

A. A. S. Vol. XX, pp. 169, 172-173)

Vatican II

That more perfect form of participation in the Mass whereby the faithful, after the priest's Communion, receive the Lord's body from the same sacrifice, is strongly recommended. (SL. no. 55)

Paul VI

In his apostolic letter 'The unfathomable riches of Christ' he wrote :

"We desire above all that the Heart of Jesus be honoured by a more intense participation in the Sacrament of the altar, since its greatest gift is the Eucharist.

This form of devotion consists essentially in worthily adoring Jesus Christ and offering Him reparation; it is based above all on the sacred mystery of the Eucharist." *

(*Investigabiles divitias Christi*, Feb. 6, 1965—

A. A. S. Vol. LVII, pp. 300, 301)

* See these texts in full on page 50.

IV
Communion
on nine consecutive First Fridays
or
on every First Friday

Some authors say that our Lord asked St. Margaret Mary to promote the reception of Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays.

THIS STATEMENT IS NOT CORRECT

The promise concerning Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays is found only once in her writings, and that in a letter to her former superior, Mother de Saumaise.* In that letter she speaks of different subjects, and the promise is inserted between two paragraphs that have no reference to Holy Communion.

Neither in this text nor in any other text of St. Margaret Mary do we find that our Lord asked her for such a novena of Communions. On the contrary, in the text mentioned in Section III, 2, 3 we see our Lord explicitly asking for the Communion on the First Friday of every month. The French text reads: "tous les premiers Vendredis de chaque mois" the literal translation of which is "on all the First Fridays of every month" implying a special emphasis that she should receive Communion on every First Friday (and not only on nine).

Again, we cannot say that St. Margaret Mary promoted the practice of the nine First Friday Communions. The only text concerning this is the promise mentioned above, while all the other documents we have, speak about Communion on every First Friday.

* Letter 86, p. 397.

LETTER TO MOTHER DUBUYSSON, OCTOBER 22, 1689

“As soon as the people of Marseilles heard about this devotion, they importuned the preachers to give them sermons about it and to carefully explain this devotion to them. In less than two weeks it spread so widely that an **incredible number of devout people go to Communion every First Friday.** We are told too that the Reverend Jesuit Fathers are going to establish this devotion in all their houses and that they are going to have the young Fathers who do not yet say mass go to **Communion every First Friday of the month.**”

(L. 109, p. 471)

LETTER TO MOTHER GREYFIE, 1690 *

“If you only knew what consolation I feel at seeing the devotion to this divine Heart grow and bring forth such great fruit that people are taking to it with eager love as to the source of salvation! The laity are having chapels built and Masses founded in his honour for **every First Friday of the month.**” (L. 119, p. 492)

We cannot say, therefore, that St. Margaret Mary promoted the practice of the nine consecutive First Fridays, but she was greatly desirous that people should receive communion on every First Friday.

All this shows that we are right in explaining this promise as Christ's manifestation of his ardent desire that we participate in the Eucharistic Banquet and receive Him into our hearts.

Let us tell the people that our Lord has such an ardent desire to come into our hearts that He promised that, if we receive Communion at least on nine consecutive First Fridays,

* This is one of the last letters of St. Margaret Mary as she died that same year (17th of October.)

He would give us the grace to die in his love. So let us give Him the pleasure of having his desire fulfilled not only by receiving Communion on nine First Fridays but by communicating on every First Friday.

AND THIS

IN A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE, OF LOVE AND OF REPARATION.

SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE AND LOVE

We have seen in Section III, 3 that our Lord asked St. Margaret Mary to receive Communion on the First Friday of every month in order to make reparation for all the outrages He has received during the month in the Blessed Sacrament. (p. 61)

Immediately afterwards there follow these words of our Lord :

“ I thirst, and with so burning a thirst to be loved by men in the Blessed Sacrament, that this thirst consumes me and I find nobody who tries according to my desire to quench my thirst by making a special return to my love.”

(Letter to Fr. Croiset : L. 133, p. 580)

This is indeed an appeal for gratitude and love.

Truly the Eucharist (sacrifice, banquet, presence) is the greatest gift of Jesus' love for us. Pope Paul VI called it “ the greatest gift of his Heart ”.* It is in the Eucharist that He has lavished all the treasures of his affection for us, poured out all his kindness. **So quite naturally we have to show Him our gratitude for the Eucharist and render Him therein a special return for his love.**

* See full text on p. 50.

SPIRIT OF REPARATION

The word 'reparation' is sometimes not well understood nowadays. Yet it is the flower of love, the most exquisite form of love. By our sins we deny Christ our love; thus He loses love and so that He may not lose any, we show Him a greater love and generosity. Since He has shown us such a great love in the Eucharist, sins against it (disrespect, coldness, indifference) offend Him in a special way and so we have to make reparation for these sins, namely, **show Christ a still greater love by receiving Communion oftener and especially on the First Friday of every month, as asked by our Lord.** *



* See Section III/3 on p. 61.

V

Love for the Poor in the writings of St. Margaret Mary

She speaks about it first in her Autobiography. What Margaret Mary says refers to the period of her life prior to her entering the religious life, when she was a girl of about eighteen.

“ I asked our Lord to teach me and show me what He wished me to do in order to please Him. This He did in the following manner: He inspired me with so tender a love for the poor that I would gladly have conversed with no other persons. He also impressed upon me such deep feelings of compassion for their miseries that, had it been in my power, I would have retained nothing for myself; therefore, when I had any money, I gave it to poor children to induce them to come to me, that I might teach them the catechism and the prayers

“ It was generally thought that I gave to the poor everything I could find, but I would not have dared do that for fear of taking what did not belong to me; I was careful to give only what was my own, and even that I did not dare do without leave. Indeed, I was obliged to use endearing words to induce my mother to allow me to give away what I had, but, as she loved me tenderly, she consented more or less willingly.” (Aut. no. 20, p. 44)

Before joining the convent, Margaret Mary went about visiting the poor, spoke kindly to them and distributed to them what she had. When they were sick, she also nursed them, and though she felt great repugnance to look at wounds, she overcame herself and dressed their wounds. (Aut. no. 20, p. 45 — *La Sainte de Paray*, by Jean Ladame, p. 321.)

After joining, though she belonged to a strictly contemplative Order and was unable to leave the convent, she always had at heart the good of the poor.

What was called 'the hospital' of Paray in the time of St. Margaret Mary was a narrow house with four beds where poor sick people were nursed by two women. Bl. Claude la Colombiere did his best to improve the hospital and procured funds for the upkeep of the sick. St. Margaret Mary too was greatly interested in this work. Some girls, her old 'boarders' took charge of the hospital and even formed a religious congregation. She encouraged several girls to serve the poor in the hospital, telling them that the hospital was really the work of God, meant for the good of the poor.

(La Sainte de Paray, by Jean Ladame, p. 284)

Here are three extracts from letters which she wrote to her younger brother Jacques Alacoque, parish priest of Bois Sainte Marie :

"Avoid everything superfluous in your dress and in everything that concerns your person ; and what you save in this way, you must give to the poor." (L. 58, p. 343)

"Watch carefully over your little flock. Be a kind father to them, providing for all their spiritual needs Be gentle and patient towards all so that all may feel, but especially the poor, that they may approach you in their needs." (L. 71, p. 366)

"You see plainly, my dear brother, that I do not mean to advise you to perform great austerities, but rather generously to mortify your passions and inclinations, detaching your heart and emptying it of all that is earthly ; exercising charity towards the neighbour and liberality towards the poor."

(L. 81, p. 389)

VI

History of the tabular form of the Promises *

1) As far as we know from existing documents, the tabular form of the Promises was published for the **FIRST TIME** in 1863, that is, one year before the beatification of Margaret Mary (19th August 1864).

2) The eleven first Promises of the tabular form were printed on the inside page of the cover of a booklet entitled "Les Offices du Sacre-Coeur de Jesus ou exercice d'adoration perpetuelle". The title of the Promises was: "Promises made by Jesus Christ to the Venerable Margaret Mary in favour of persons devoted to his Sacred Heart." One copy of the booklet is found in the archives of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial.

We do not know for sure who the author of that booklet is. However, on the back page of the cover we find the advertisement: "Available with the publisher ** of the Sacred Heart Messenger the following publications: L' Apostolat de la Priere par le Pere H. Ramiere (1861); Petit manuel de l' Apostolat de la Priere; le Rosaire de l' Apostolat de la Priere." Besides, after the title of the booklet, we find the following words: "for use of the Associates of the Apostleship of Prayer".

* This comprehensive historical study on the tabular form of the Promises was made possible owing to documents found in the archives of the Visitation Monastery of Paray-le-Monial of which photocopies were sent us.

** In French, editeur

One is therefore inclined to think that the author may have been one of the Jesuit Fathers in charge of the Apostleship of Prayer whose Centre was then at Vals (Le Puy) where it had been founded on the 3rd of December, 1844. *

The booklet was “seen and approved by Montagnac, the Vicar Capitular, 29 January 1863 at Le Puy” (Haute Loire). It was printed in the same town by M. P. Marchessou and published by Regis Ruffet in Paris, Lyons and Bruxelles.

3) The above-mentioned printer, M. P. Marchessou of Le Puy, also printed and published different leaflets concerning the devotion to the Sacred Heart, one of which was a leaflet bearing the eleven Promises of the tabular form with the title “Promises made by Jesus Christ to Blessed Margaret Mary...”; it was therefore printed after August 1864, the date of the beatification of Margaret Mary. One copy of this leaflet too exists in the archives of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial.

4) In 1865, a small booklet was published in Paris with the approbation of Mgr. de Marguerye, Bishop of Autun. This booklet too contained the eleven Promises of the tabular form. There exists one copy of that booklet in the archives of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial,

5) In 1881, a leaflet of eight small pages was published with the permission of the Bishop of Autun (Adolph Louis Perraud, who later on became Cardinal and was elected a member of the French Academy) in whose territory lies Paray-le-Monial. The Monastery of the Visitation possesses in its archives only half of this leaflet.

* Whoever the author was, there is no doubt that he acted with the best of intentions. Besides, the way of quoting rather loosely (modifying somewhat the texts of the author) was quite common at that time and was thought to be normal.

Judging from the half leaflet we possess, we can make out that the leaflet contained 14 promises. The promises found on the half leaflet are only nos. 1 to 6 and nos. 13 and 14; and so we do not know what were promises 7 to 12.

Promises 13 and 14 concern the Communion on the First Fridays* and the reign of the Sacred Heart respectively. They are authentic and given in the complete text of St. Margaret Mary. (see pp. 43, 52)

Promises 1 to 6 are exactly like six of the Promises of the tabular form as found on page 1 of this booklet but in a different order. There are, however, **Two Great Differences** :

First they are not given as spoken by our Lord "I will console them" but are referred to in the third person: "He will console them."

Secondly, after giving the abbreviated text of the tabular form, **the author quotes in full the text of St. Margaret Mary** and even points out at least once the inaccuracy of the wording of the abbreviated text. (v. g. "Let us note that the text of Blessed Margaret Mary does not have the word 'priests' but the much broader words 'those who work for the salvation of souls', and so we see that this promise applies to lay people also.")

6) In 1882, Philip A. Kemper, a businessman of Dayton (United States) undertook to spread the Promises. He had the first eleven Promises of the tabular form printed on a picture of the Sacred Heart and distributed profusely in all parts of the world. By 1895 the promises had already been translated into 238 languages.

* This is the first time that the twelfth Promise, namely, the one concerning the nine consecutive First Friday Communions was included in any printed list of the Promises.

7) Already in 1890, the bicentenary of the death of St. Margaret Mary, the Bishop of Autun (Cardinal Adolph Louis Perraud) in whose diocese lies Paray-le-Monial, deplored this circulation of the Promises in the tabular form which, in his own words "were obviously pretty different from the words and even from the meaning of the expressions used by Bl. Margaret Mary" and wanted that the Promises be published in the full authentic texts as found in her writings. We know this from the Annals of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial.

8) **As regards the Visitation Monastery**, it is clear from what has been said above and from the archives that it possesses that it did not compose the tabular form of the Promises, but, as the present Rev. Mother Superior told me, the Monastery must have been circulating it for some time.

However, it is already pretty long since it has stopped doing so. In 1956 it published the "Livret-guide sur le sanctuaire des apparitions du Sacre-Coeur". On page 25 the booklet has: "Unhappily the text propagated by Mr. Kemper was made up of very short formulae. Here is the full and authentic text which ought to be spread." Then there follows a list of eight Promises in the full original text of St. Margaret Mary.

THE MONASTERY ALSO PUBLISHED THESE PROMISES AS A SEPARATE LEAFLET WHICH BORE THE FOOTNOTE;

"Most of the time in propaganda leaflets or holy pictures, they reproduce the Promises in an inexact way and through abbreviated formulae..... The texts given here are 'Texte Authentique' guaranteed by the diocesan authority."

A FEW MONTHS AGO (MAY 1978), THE REVEREND MOTHER SUPERIOR OF THE VISITATION MONASTERY, PARAY-LE-MONIAL, WROTE TO ME:

“We are now thinking of not using so much the word Promesses’ (Promises) but rather the word ‘Bienfaits’. The Bishop who is in charge of the pilgrimages at Paray is preparing a new ‘Guide for the pilgrims,’ and he too is in favour of that word.”

It is indeed a very appropriate word. But apparently there is no exact equivalent of it in English. “Advantages, benefits, fruits” of the devotion are not expressive enough. “Les Bienfaits” of the devotion to the Sacred Heart means all the good that this devotion brings along with it, all the good that Christ, in his love for us, will bring us through this devotion.

The reasons the Reverend Mother Superior and the Bishop at Paray had for choosing the word ‘Bienfaits’ are the following :

First, it is a beautiful word with the connotation of a gift of love which is very apt in the matter of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

Then, the word ‘Bienfaits’ has the great advantage that we do not have to narrow down the good done by the devotion to the ‘Promises’, namely, to what our Lord explicitly promised, but it allows us to quote the many fine passages of St. Margaret Mary in which she explains the spiritual good wrought by the devotion (v. g. see such a passage on page 9).

Conclusion

As we have already remarked, we ought not to put the Promises at the very centre of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, so that the faithful are drawn principally by them.

The end we should always pursue, “in season and out of season,” is **to lead all to a greater love of Christ and through Him to the love of the Most Holy Trinity.**

If this is done, then devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus will attain its purpose and its full and glorious effect in the hearts of men.



A Prayer

ST. MARGARET MARY WROTE TO MOTHER DE SAUMAISE:

“On the feast of the beloved disciple I happened to recall that it was on this very day... that our Lord gave me his Heart, his Cross and his Love.” (L. 96, p. 425)

**May Jesus give us also his Heart
 so that with his Heart,
 with his Love,
 we may love the Heavenly Father
 and all our brethren
 and spend our life in their service.**

The Promises of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary

(A textual, theological and pastoral study)

This study has been undertaken at the special request of Cardinal Knox, Prefect of the Congregation of the Sacraments and Divine Worship. He himself read the manuscript and asked the author to publish it.

The booklet shows the theological soundness, the spiritual solidity, the pastoral utility, the great exigencies as well as the abundant supernatural fruits of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, as found in the writings of St. Margaret Mary.

Part Three (I to V) is perhaps more important even than Part Two as it presents a true picture of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, as found in the writings of the saint.

Indeed, from the point of view of spirituality or dogmatic and pastoral theology, everything in her writings is well-balanced, in perfect conformity with Scripture and the teaching of the Church.

In that way the booklet will update the devotion by a greater authenticity and a perfect fidelity to the words of our Lord and of St. Margaret Mary, and thus remove some serious objections which high placed theologians had against the devotion.

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