

Pray and Promote



Venerable Mother Magdalen Taylor 1832 - 1900.



Painting of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from the Peterskirche, Vienna

MUTITO KENYA 1985



Poor Servants of the Mother of God
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A.M.D.G.

Editorial

As we advance into the last year of this decade, we are delighted to send you this issue of Pray and Promote, continuing with our Kenyan story and the new expanding wings of SMG worldwide. We express our sincere thanks to Rosarii O'Connor SMG, Congregational Leader, for her original and colourful description of some of her memories on mission to Kenya. She opens up for us the feelings of being an outsider, the need for enculturation. The liveliness and the adaptability to situations and the resourcefulness required are good humouredly described and elegantly illustrated through her photographs. Rosarii's practical approach comes right through with her ending words 'Deo Gratias'. Many thanks Rosarii.

For some time, going deeper into Mother's devotions to the Immaculate Heart of Mary has been on my radar. We hope you will take comfort and consolation from this wonderful piece of research and analysis by Paul Shaw, SMG Congregational Archivist. He has used a wide range of primary and other resources, relying heavily on a very thorough 1949 paper by Fr Kilian J Healy O. Carm. One thing we can appreciate is the great variety of titles attributed to Mary. As Venerable Mother Magdalen Taylor promoted great devotion to the Sacred Heart, it is hardly surprising that the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary also had a high place among the SMGs. We express our sincere thanks to Paul for exploring some of the nuances of this devotion in the Church.

With deep gratitude we share with you two Favours received recently through the intercession of Venerable Mother Magdalen Taylor. Faith and perseverance in prayer win the day for people who have so many struggles to manage daily. Let us in this New Year, sharpen our resolve to fervently and consciously Pray to and Promote knowledge of and devotion to the life and example of Venerable Mother Magdalen Taylor.

We sincerely commend this edition of P & P to your reading and enjoyment and once again thank our contributors for their inspiring inputs.

Mary Kenefick SMG
Editor

Mission Sunday 2018...memories of the early days!



My first Kenyan Home in Mutito, Kituia solid building surrounded by parched grass, goats, hens and happy noisy people by day, but quiet as a graveyard once darkness fell.

10th. October 1985 - my first Sunday Mass ended in a mini-trauma. I could not understand the announcements as all was in kikamba. I was an outsider. I did not know what

was to take place during the coming week!

Belonging became very important to me. Not many local people spoke English but we did communicate non-verbally. During the years as I rode around to schools or outstations on my motorbike I was known and totally accepted. I felt safe and never feared a break down. I



was among friends. The missionary fellowship was tremendous.

We, newcomers, were embraced by all.

Religious Congregations celebrated Christmas with their neighbours, and there were many Diocesan events. St. Patrick's Day was a highlight but no missionary ever went home without a proper "send off".



SMG MINISTRY

Our community consisted of Srs. Ignatius Barron (RIP) and Josephine Coughlan who were both nurses as well as 'Ca' Howard and myself as teachers.



Ignatius was of course our pioneer. I had never lived in a nursing community but I grew in appreciation and awe of the work done by Ignatius and Josephine. I witnessed miracles almost daily. Patients of every age, assisted by family or neighbours, came by every possible means of transport, bicycle (on the bar) donkey cart, or occasionally the mission pick-up truck. Babies and even quite big children were carried by their mothers.

Those who, to my inexperienced eyes,

arrived dying, often returned home smiling and restored. Dehydration, malaria, snake bite and a variety of illnesses called for diagnosis and treatment by the two "daktari". There were outstations to be visited – long hot tiring days with many patients, difficult journeys and frequent break-downs. Care of the sick was the priority, not personal comfort. In rainy season the Sisters and staff were truly heroic. Literally thousands of lives were saved.



School memories are endless.... Sr. Catherine saved the Irish newspapers. These were given to the students in Mutito Boys' School, as reading material and to cover their books. If I had to attend a meeting, enthusiastic young untrained teachers, vied with each other for extra classes to assist their students. Philomena, a quiet, shy orphan, reared by very poor elderly grandparents was sponsored by SMGs. On completion of secondary School, she worked as a maid for a year, obtained a bursary for University and called to say good-bye. She radiated happiness and looked like a queen. An elderly grandmother requested assistance with fees for her grandson. She was given bus fare to the next parish. Later that evening the young boy returned with the change (about 2p)

GRATITUDE

How humbling it was to be given three eggs or a hen from the poorest of the poor in return for a visit to a homestead. Farewell presents of a tiny handkerchief wrapped in newspaper, a home-made picture frame, a bunch of bananas, an outsize card spoke of hearts that sincerely appreciated our presence and our service.

ENDURING MEMORIES

Simplicity of lifestyle

School began at 7.00 a.m (a shock to the Irish system)

Indescribable quietness as we gazed at the milky way while eating our supper outside.

The colour of the butterflies and the plumage of the starlings and weaver birds.

The excitement of watching the ripening maize and mangoes.

The perpetual laughter and singing of the youth – great in small doses but annoying when it lasted all day on Saturdays

The infestation of flying bugs every rainy season.

The initial terror at riding a motor bicycle or driving on truly horrendous roads.

Tears of frustration at the red tape involved in opening a school

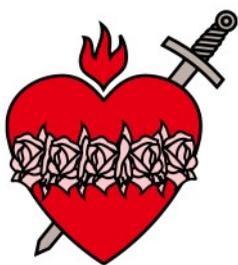
The generosity of the poor as they gave what they had at the regular fund raising functions for church, school development medical emergencies etc.

We had no mission statement, there was no strategic plan but people were served joyfully. We helped improve the quality of life of many. We were convinced that Mother Magdalen would have approved wholeheartedly. Since then the SMG seed has germinated. It grows and flourishes.

Deo Gratias.

Sr. Rosarii O'Connor, Congregational Leader.

Venerable Mother Magdalen's devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary



I have been asked by the editor of 'Pray and Promote' to see if I can find in the archives evidence for Mother Magdalen's devotion to the Heart of Mary, mother of Jesus. This seems most appropriate, as in previous issues of this magazine, we have sought to identify and analyse material which serves to cast light on those devotions of Mother Magdalen, which are perhaps less well known today than they were to her and her companions and contemporaries. This devotion to the Heart of Mary has, in fact, greatly grown in popularity and importance in the Catholic Church since Mother Magdalen's death in 1900, and has received much greater official recognition. In October 1942, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the appearance of the Marian apparitions at Fátima in Portugal, Pope Pius XII consecrated the Church and the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Portuguese Cardinal Cerejeira announced at this time: 'This opens a new era in Christian spirituality – the era of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.'¹ Mother Magdalen may thus be said to have shown great foresight in the emphasis which she came to place upon this devotion. The conclusions I come to below are inevitably highly tentative, and any comments or further information on the points discussed would be greatly welcomed.

Regrettably, it is not possible with the evidence that we have to trace clearly how Mother Magdalen's view of this devotion developed. One very important source of information on the devotional life of Mother Magdalen and the early SMG Sisters is contained within the various versions of the Rule and Constitutions of the congregation, which include some direction on the spiritual and devotional life of the Sisters. Moreover, we know that for Mother Magdalen this devotion was directly linked to a most important date in her own life and the life of her institute: that date in 1872 when she took her final vows as a religious, which is now regarded as the founding date of the congregation. Her companion Sr Mary Campion SMG, in the first full biography of Mother Magdalen, wrote: 'The day on which Mother Magdalen made her First and Final Vows – February 12th 1872, is now, by Brief of Pope Leo XIII, kept in all the convents of the Institute as the Feast of the Most Pure Heart of Mary'.²

Despite the clear significance of this date, there is not a great deal to be found relating to this devotion in the early congregational rule books, in the compilation of Mother Magdalen's Instructions on the Rule, in her spiritual notebooks, or in her multitudinous literary works –to the extent that these latter have been identified. Alone amongst Mother Magdalen's songs and verses she had copied down the simple rhyming refrains from a poem by George Eliot,³ calling on the protection of the Heart of Mary, below is an extract:

‘Heart of Mary, bless the way,
Keep us all by night and day.

Heart of Mary, Mystic Rose,
Send us all a sweet repose.

Heart of Mary, Morning Star,
Ward off danger, near and far.’

Fortunately, there are a number of references in Mother Magdalen's ‘circular letters’ to the congregation, which are one of the most important sources of her spiritual teaching to the Sisters. The very earliest versions of the Rule, dated prior to the formal founding of the congregation, have nothing to say about this devotion. For instance, the versions of the Rule dated 1874, 1879 and 1892 contain much fascinating information on the devotions of the congregation: to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to ‘Our Blessed Lady’, to St Joseph and to St Ignatius of Loyola. The latter version of the rule also has a section⁴ on the ‘spirit and devotions’ of the congregation, specifically mentioning 25th March, the Feast of the Annunciation, described as ‘the greatest Festival’, and the date of the consecration of the congregation to the Sacred Heart, on December 28th 1873. The three ‘particular feasts’ of the congregation listed are the Annunciation, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady's Maternity.

The central role played by the devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary in the spiritual life of the congregation is well known. It is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the paintings which Mother Magdalen had executed to her design, the ‘Sacred Heart Pleading’ – portraying Christ perpetually interceding with the God the Father for the whole human race – and the very unusual painting of the Annunciation, intended to depict the very moment of the Incarnation – surely the central event in human history, and in the redemption of humankind –

when the archangel Gabriel had departed, and ‘the Word was made Flesh’. Very clearly, in Mother Magdalen’s mind, these devotions were symbiotically linked, as enunciated most clearly in her circular letter dated December 22nd 1891, in which she said: ‘Remember our great devotion, the key note of our life, is the hearts of Jesus and Mary knit together as they were when Mary bore her Lord in her womb...from this devotion to these hearts full of love flows forth our other note, as it were, love of the poor...’⁵

This fundamental connection between the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and that to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is a spiritual insight which goes to the very root of both devotions, as theologians have recognised from the beginning. Mother Magdalen’s devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus seems to date back to her earliest years as a Catholic, reflective, no doubt, *firstly* of the Jesuit influence on her nascent Catholic spirituality, and *secondly* of her growing knowledge of and engagement with popular French devotions, with the lives of French saints and religious founders, and with French models of the religious life. The key figures in the development of the devotion to the Heart of Mary were St John Eudes (1601-1680), and the famous Visitandine nun St Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), whose visions became central to the formulation and promulgation of the devotion. Mother Magdalen had expressed the greatest admiration for St Margaret Mary.⁶ Both Saints taught that the surest way to the Heart of Jesus was through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mother Magdalen taught this also, saying in the letter quoted above that graces from the Sacred Heart will be granted ‘by the hands of His beloved Mother’. The language used in the circular letter of 28th January 1896, reproduced in full below, is even more unmistakable in this regard.

Mother Magdalen entered briefly as an aspirant with the Daughters of Charity in 1861, and was very conversant with their spirituality: certainly by this time she was aware of the apparition of the Virgin Mary which had appeared to St Catherine Labouré in Paris in 1830, which led directly to the production and distribution of the ‘Miraculous Medal’ (left), uniting symbols of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.⁷ This was part of the European Catholic milieu which the future religious founder entered following her conversion in 1855. It is interesting to note, however, that Mother Magdalen’s emphasis in her teaching to her Sisters dif-



fers somewhat from that of St John Eudes. The cult of the Heart of Mary had always been focused on the strength of Mary's love, particularly her love for God and for her divine Son. As we have noted above, from at least 1892 there was in fact a celebration within the SMG congregation on the Feast of Our Lady's Maternity (October 11th), for which a Papal Decree had been obtained. But Mother Magdalen particularly emphasised that the devotion to the Heart of Mary was reflective of the Virgin's love not just for the Trinity but for the whole of humankind, closely associating her with the love of her Son for humanity, which was expressed most fully in His Incarnation, and was most perfectly symbolised by His Sacred Heart. This aspect of the devotion was particularly emphasised in 1944 in Pope Pius XII's decree, which established a universal feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary within the Church to be celebrated on August 22nd.⁸

I will now make few tentative observations about the date on which the Feast of the Heart of Mary has been celebrated by the SMG congregation, and within the Church as a whole. On July 21st 1855 the Congregation of Rites approved an Office and Mass of the Feast of the 'Most Pure Heart of Mary', though it was not at that time made universal for the whole church. Local celebrations of the feast were held, for example, in Rome, on the Sunday after the Octave of the Assumption and at other times; among the Eudists (the Congregation of Jesus and Mary founded by St John Eudes) and in a number of other communities on 8th February; and at the great Parisian Marian shrine of *Nôtre-Dame des Victoires*, shortly prior to Lent. Mother Magdalen referred to in her circular letter of January 1896 (below) to the fact that there was no fixed date for the feast applicable to the whole Church: the date in August finally adopted in 1944 was that observed by the Jesuits.

Mother Magdalen does not in fact refer to the reason why the date in February came to be associated by her with the Heart of Mary devotion, which must thus remain speculative to some degree. In the 1879 congregational Rule this date is passed over, and in the 'catalogue of masses and prayers' – more emphasis is placed on the 24th Sept 1869, the day 'on which the first three Sisters began the Institute'. However, in the 1892 Rule it is stated (section 416): 'On the 12th February, the day on which the first Sister of the Congregation made her Vows, all the Sisters shall receive Holy Communion in our Lady's honour to obtain her blessing; if Ash Wednesday fall on this day, they will defer the Communion till the next day'.

The 1902 version of the Rule somewhat extends this section, and concludes with a clause saying that all the Marian feasts shall be communion days for the Sisters, listing the Visitation, the feast of the Expectation, the ‘feast of the Most Pure Heart of Mary’, the Immaculate Conception, and the Translation of the Holy House. Under the ‘catalogues of masses and prayers’, section 409, is given the following: ‘On the 12th February (granted by Decree to the Institute, as the Feast of the Most Pure Heart of Mary), the day on which the first Sister of the Congregation [The Mother Foundress] made her Vows, all the Sisters shall receive Holy Communion in our Lady’s honour to obtain her blessing...’ This clause was repeated in successive versions of the SMG Rule and Constitutions in 1932 and 1944. Additionally, two prayers to the Immaculate Heart of Mary were included in the SMG Institute Manual of 1946.

Fortunately, in the congregational archives in Brentford, there is a copy of the translation of the Papal Decree granting this privilege, on the petition of Mother Magdalen herself, and dated January 30th 1895.⁹ It is stated in the decree that ‘...as the feast in honour of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one of public solemnity, every year on the twelfth day of February, all the masses to be said in the Churches or Oratories of the said Institute may be celebrated as proper of the feast of the same most Pure Heart of Mary’. The meaning here seems a little ambiguous: I have not found any evidence that February 12th was a day on which this feast was celebrated in the Church at this time, so does the wording imply that, perhaps informally, the date was already honoured within the congregation in celebration of the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary? If so, maybe this reflects a growing appreciation by Mother Magdalen of this devotion, mirrored in the change of emphasis from the holy days listed in the 1879 Rule compared to that of 1892. This can only be surmised unless further evidence is discovered.

Equally, Mother Magdalen’s devotion to the Saints and Holy Days of the Christian Calendar is well attested, and it may be that on her vow day, seeking a Marian Feast which was temporally near, that she came to associate this day with the Immaculate Heart of Mary which was celebrated by the Eudists but a few days previously. It is almost certain also that she would have been aware of the archconfraternity devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary established at *Nôtre-Dame-des-Victoires*, a church which she greatly loved. The date of the celebration of the feast there, shortly before Lent, may conceivably also have had an influence upon her in hon-

ouring her vow day. Again, this can only be put forward as a speculation unless more evidence becomes available.

I will end with some brief observations on two points.

In the circular letter of 1896 below, Mother Magdalen refers to office prepared by her so that the Sisters can observe the feast. Unfortunately, no such office book survives in the SMG archives in Brentford. However, there is an amended manuscript office to the Immaculate Heart of Mary filed amongst Mother Magdalen's literary papers.¹⁰ A closer examination of this document may reveal a version of the very words which the SMG Sisters offered up on Mother Magdalen's vow day in honour of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and it may perhaps be worthy of transcription and even of republication.

Finally, with regard to the title of the Virgin Mary as conferred by the devotion. Mary's Heart has on different occasions and in different contexts been described in the Church as Most Pure, Most Sweet, Most Sacred etc. In 1855 the Congregation of Rites preferred the designation 'Most Pure...' and this is also the wording of the translation of the decree of 1895 referred to above. However, it seems clear from the evidence that Mother Magdalen preferred the designation 'Immaculate Heart of Mary', which was later adopted by the Catholic Church in its official pronouncements. Again, we can only speculate on the reason for this, but it can perhaps be linked to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, emphasising Virgin Mary's life-long grace and purity, which was formally defined and promulgated by the Catholic Church as official teaching in 1854. Mother Magdalen would have been very familiar with the beautiful and majestic column, topped by an elegant statue of the Virgin Mary, standing very near to her own congregation's Convent of the Incarnation (now known as *Mater Dei*) in Rome, which had been erected in honour of the Immaculate Conception. Mother Magdalen would surely have wished the highest honour which the Catholic Church had conferred on the Mother of God be reflected in her congregation's devotions.

Footnotes

¹Quoted in Healy, Kilian J, 'Theology of the Doctrine of the Heart of Mary', in *Proceedings of the Fourth Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (1949). Page 102

²Sister Mary Campion Troughton, 'Life of Mother Foundress' (1972). Page 112

³The poem was 'Agatha' (1869). Mother Magdalen had great admiration for the works

of George Eliot. See *Dublin Review* Vol 47 no 93, Nov 1859. Pages 33-42. Review of *Adam Bede*

⁴Chapter X

⁵SMG Archive ref. I/A/5/2/10/11(a). Punctuation added

⁶Mother Magdalen wrote of her: 'she was but a feeble instrument in an Almighty Hand. After a long course of contradictions she conquered. The devotion to the Sacred Heart took its rise in the humble convent, and spread into the whole world.' Frances Taylor, *Religious Orders; Or Sketches of Some of the Orders and Congregations of Women* by the author of 'Eastern Hospitals' etc, Burns and Lambert. London, 1862. Page 181

⁷*Ibid*, Page 299

⁸However, in the 1969 Church calendar this feast became an optional 'memoria'

⁹SMG Archive ref. II/C Box 1

¹⁰SMG Archive ref. I/A/8/1 Box 3 File 3

Paul Shaw, SMG Congregational Central Archivist.

'Circular Letter' of Mother Magdalen on the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

(SMG Archive ref I/A/5/3/1/1)

AMDG Rome 28th January 1896

Circular Letter for 12th February

My dear Children

I must again write to you about our dear Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. There is no fixed day for this feast in the Church. The Society of Jesus keep the feast of the Most Pure Heart of Mary in August. This feast is of the Immaculate Heart & we petitioned the Holy Father to allow us to celebrate it on the 12th of February because that was the day of the first profession in our Institute. And he granted the request.

We kept it last year for the first time & I hope you will all keep it fervently this year.

Now I have been preparing for your use an office of devotion for the Immaculate Heart of Mary taken from the Roman Breviary and I hope this will be in your hands by the 12th and I hope you will all say it on that day on the eve partly even in the house when you dont generally say office or

only a small part – that on this day you will say all one Nocturn only for Matins of course.

I am sure that you will find that one benefit of this office will be to increase your knowledge of the Psalms and Holy Scripture and holy writers – then also may it increase your devotion to the Heart of Mary –that Heart Immaculate. All pure & holy. The prayer used in the office tells us that by our devotion to the Heart of Mary we shall become more like the Heart of Jesus. What a grand thing that will be for us.

Now let us consider the Heart of Mary this Heart is twice spoken of in the Gospel we are told after the Nativity of Our Lord. But Mary kept all these things pondering them in her heart’ Then again after the loss of our Lord for three days finding Him in the temple & His return to Nazareth it is said. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart.

Now let us try and understand what the Holy Ghost means by telling us this surely it is that we too should ponder on our Lady’s Heart.

Then when we speak of a person who ponders on things who keeps things in her heart – do we not see at once that she is a thoughtful person one who does not forget.

See then what an example she is to us – How we should learn from her to be thoughtful & to recollect. No one can be in earnest who does not think [.] We should ponder over our rule the instructions we hear the advice we receive on it will do us no good & if we do not recollect our business we shall not give God glory& cause great pain to others

Now God bless you all my dear Children –

Have a Holy &happy Feast & pray for

Your affectionate Mother in Xt

Mary Magdalen of the Sacred Heart

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Middle and bottom photographs on page 15 courtesy of Sr. Meki Ngemo

Favours Received.

A lady for Formby wrote “I would like you to know that I have had 2 special intentions granted through the intercession of Venerable Mother Magdalen Taylor, one for health reasons and the other for family troubles. Thank you”

The following letter was received by Sr Clare Lonergan from Vivian a relative of hers in America.

Sr Clare wrote “Vivian is a very devout Catholic, very prayerful. About a month ago she phoned me and asked for the Sisters’ prayers for a baby in the parish named Gabriella who was seriously ill. She is two months old and had a “mass” in one of her lungs which was thought to be incurable. I immediately said that I would pray to Venerable Mother Magdalen Taylor for her and would request the Sisters to do so too, which I did. Vivian at once said “you sent me a leaflet about Mother Magdalen years ago, can you send me some copies so I can get others to pray to her” I did so and had a phone call from Vivian, saying how delighted the people were to receive them and one of the nurses in the hospital asked her for my address. Then yesterday I received the enclosed letter.

It reads “To my dear Sisters in Christ, Thank you for your prayers and well wishes for baby Gabriella 2 months old. A “mass” in her lung had to be removed. The operation was a success; she was in ICU and now is home and on her way to a complete recovery.

Thank you and praise you Lord, our God, Frances Taylor, (Mother Magdalen) and all the Sisters and Brothers for your prayers. The power of prayer! Praise the lord.

Thank you, Sr Mary Clare
Vivian Deehan”



A collage of the 2012 celebrations at the close of the Year of Mother Magdalen



Sr. Josephine SMG, Postulants and young girls in Mulutu Convent



SMG Sisters and young girls praying together in Mulutu Convent.

FRANCES MARGARET TAYLOR

(1832-1900)

Venerable Mother Magdalen

Frances Margaret Taylor was the tenth child of a Lincolnshire Anglican Clergyman. In 1854 she joined Florence Nightingale's Lady Volunteer Nurses to the Crimean War, where hospital conditions affected her deeply. Her contacts with the Irish Sisters of Mercy and the vivid faith of the Irish soldiers turned her mind to the Catholic Church.

She was received into the Catholic Church by Father Woollett SJ, a Royal Army Chaplain. After the Crimean War, Frances devoted herself to the service of the poor in London. Feeling called to the Religious Life she tried her vocation with the Daughters of Charity and with the Daughters of the Heart of Mary. God willed otherwise, and in 1872, with the help of Lady Georgiana Fullerton and Father Clare SJ the Congregation of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God came into being with Frances, now Mother Magdalen Taylor, at its head.

Every form of poverty and misery found succour and shelter in her maternal heart, and today the Sisters of this Religious Congregation and members of the SMG family continue to be inspired by her vision.

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