

WORK OF MERCIFUL LOVE (the)**WORK OF MERCIFUL LOVE (the)**

WORK OF MERCIFUL LOVE (the), *Œuvre de l'Amour miséricordieux*, movement of devotion of French origin.

This was a devotional and doctrinal movement that was very widespread during the twenties and thirties of the xxth Century, in Spain. Its origins are in the writings and paintings of the French Nun Marie-Thérèse Desandais (1876-1943), of the Monastery of the Visitation of Dreux. The French Nun was the author of an image of Christ, Merciful Love, and numerous writings on divine mercy ; she was therefore one of the Nuns who, during the first half of the xxth Century, and from various parts of Europe, spread messages about the mercy of God. Desandais had started her drawings and messages in the early years of the century and she considered herself to be the continuator of the mission of Marguerite-Marie of Alacoque and Thérèse of Lisieux. Her writings, published by the Work of Merciful Love by hundreds of thousands under the pseudonym Sulamitis, spread, in Spain, a vigorous message of spiritual renewal and holiness. The Work of Merciful Love was presented as the true devotion to the Sacred Heart, that the present times claimed, and as the instrument to revitalize all of the Catholic works and institutions and accelerate Christ's reign.

The most characteristic elements of the Work of Merciful Love were the image of the Merciful Love and the Offering Prayer. The image represents Christ alive, on the cross, with his heart in flames on which the word *charitas* appears written ; the Sacred Host as the background of the image ; at his feet the Gospel Book which, illuminated by rays that come out of Christ's heart, let's us read the words from the *mandatum novum* (John 13, 34) and, next to it the crown, a symbol of Christ's kingship ; at the bottom of the representation the legend reads : "The Merciful Love". For its part, the Offering to Merciful Love was composed by Desandais herself and was reproduced in most of her writings. The text of the Offering read as follows : "Holy Father, by the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer Jesus, your beloved Son and I offer myself in Him — with Him — by Him — to all his intentions and in the name of all the creatures". The Work of Merciful Love recommended renewing this offer daily, privately, during the Mass, at the moment when the Sacred Host is raised.

The Work of Merciful Love began to spread throughout Spain in early 1922 and its expansion went on growing until it disappeared suddenly and completely, in 1942, on suspicion that it was a forbidden devotion. In 1935 it came to have a regular publication of its own, though it had a very short life.

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) had the opportunity to know and bless the Work of Merciful Love on several occasions, although he could not write the letter on Merciful Love, nor established a celebration in its honor, just like Desandais requested in her writings. In Spain, during the twenties and thirties, a great number of people from very different conditions, knew and appreciated the writings by Desandais that the Work disseminated. Among them are religious people like the Dominican theologian Juan González Arintero (*cf. supra*, col. 514-518) — its first great promoter through the magazine *La Vida Sobrenatural (The Supernatural Life)* —, or the Jesuit Saint José María Rubio, and lay women like Juana Lacasa, of its greatest propagandists ; aristocrats and maids ; the apostolic nuncio in Spain, Federico Tedeschini, and girls like today's venerable María del Carmen González-Valerio ; some founders also found a source of inspiration in the Work of Merciful Love : Blessed Esperanza de Jesús Alhama, founder of the Esclavas del Amor Misericordioso (Slaves of Merciful Love) ; José Llés and Juana Carou, who gave life to the Universal Real and Perpetual Adoration ; or Antonio Amundarain Garmendia, founder of the Alianza de Jesús por María (Alliance of Jesus for Mary) Congregation.

The Work of Merciful Love had a favorable reception, particularly during the years of the Second Republic, among many of the Spanish episcopate : Enrique Reig, Juan Belloch, Juan Bautista Luis y Pérez, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, Mateo Múgica, Pedro Segura and the canonized Manuel González are counted among the prelate who appreciated and blessed the Work of Merciful Love. In the years prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, the Work of Merciful Love came to be known, practically in all the Spanish dioceses. Catalonia and Aragón should be noted as an exception, where it was hardly spread. The picture of Merciful Love came to settle in numerous churches, chapels, schools and convents. The Atocha Basilica, in Madrid, the Church of the Dominicans of Ategorrieta, in San Sebastián, and the Church of the Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of Portacoeli, in Valladolid, were important

centers of diffusion of the Work of Merciful Love. The Work of Merciful Love should be considered, despite its complete disappearance, as a pioneer movement that, already in the first decades of the xxth century, asked the Pope for an encyclical and the establishment of a celebration dedicated to the Merciful Love.

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Bibliography

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The main biographies of the Dominican Juan Gonzalez Arintero pay attention to the Work of Merciful Love : the bibliography of the voice Juan González Arintero on this Dictionary can be consulted in this regard (*cf. supra*, col. 514-518).

In the pages of the magazine *The Supernatural Life* are several articles on the Work of Merciful Love by Arturo Alonso Lobo (1982-1983), María Jesús Muñoz Mayor (1989-1992), Alicia Bellido (1997-2002) and Pedro Fernández (1999).

Other articles :

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The most comprehensive study at the moment is F.M. Requena, *Católicos, devociones y sociedad durante la dictadura de Primo de Rivera y la Segunda República. La Obra del Amor Misericordioso en España (1922-1936)*, Madrid, 2008.

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