

...ever makes independent mention of the Devil, and if they believed in witchcraft and magic they also never comment on them. For them, God alone manages world affairs. Their one overriding religious concern is that he conduct these affairs charitably, so that the results may prove as pleasing to them as they presumably are to him.

That God responded to prayer and penance was also a basic tenet of the popular theology preached to the laity by Nuremberg's clergy. This can be seen especially during the 1590s, when Turkish armies threatened to overrun Hungary and invade western Europe. The clergy in these years arranged special services to gain divine intervention on the West's behalf. Among the measures taken in Nuremberg churches were new Sunday sermons and extended, citywide weekday prayer vigils (a quarter hour, double the normal period of time). Magdalena, a beehive of war news, documents the city's pervasive fear and unrest. Her letters keep Balthasar abreast of the comings and goings of princes and troops as they muster in Nuremberg en route to the Turkish front. There are vivid descriptions of the training of draftees, who, outfitted in red-and-white jackets, spiked helmets, and muskets, keep the city astir as they practice on paper targets at the ends of city streets and occasionally on migrating geese. Nothing terrified Magdalena more than the thought of Turkish rule; "better a plague than the Turk," she tells Balthasar.

Magdalena did not, however, require such extraordinary historical events to turn her mind to God. She seems to have read the Bible. In 1588 she asks Balthasar to buy an "Old Testament with the Psalms and the Prophets, for we often need it." Among the goods he shipped to her for distribution in 1596 was a German Bible. She invokes a Biblical allusion to describe preparations for war against the Turks: "Now is truly that very time when the Lord Christ says one will hear of

war and cries of war." When bad news arrives from the war zone she is immediately among the prayerful. "We have every reason to pray constantly," she urges; "may God be merciful and in his time help us for the sake of the small children." Learning, she claims without surprise, that the princes and lords who attended a recent Imperial Diet in Nuremberg convened by the Emperor to raise fresh troops for the eastern front did nothing but eat and drink—"the princes pledged themselves to one another with nightcaps, like stablehands"—she allows that "God must now come and take charge; may he graciously help us so that the innocent do not suffer along with the guilty."

Despite their frequent petitions for divine aid, neither Magdalena nor Balthasar considered prayer and penance sure means of securing divine favor. Such acts, as Balthasar put it, were simply a "reasonable" recognition of divine sovereignty over life's boundaries. The pair had watched too many "innocent" relatives and friends suffer and die, despite their prayers, to have believed otherwise. No matter what mortals do, whether on their knees or on their feet, they remain at God's mercy; of that Magdalena and Balthasar had no doubt.

◆ SELF-RELIANCE

MAGDALENA TO BALTHASAR

13 September 1592, in Nuremberg

Honest, kind, dearest Paumgartner:

Your letter reached me last Saturday, and I was joyed to learn of your safe arrival [in Frankfurt] and that there is now much work for you there. May God grant that all goes well and that your work may be promptly finished, so that we may come together again in joy—

although God has now made a painful tear through our joy.* In the past we have always been able to reunite with greater happiness than will unfortunately happen now. Nevertheless, our strong hope in God can again make us joyful. Amen.

Dear Paumgartner, I have read with pleasure all the news in your letter, [and I have] also [learned] that the quinces are not a success. Nevertheless, would you try to get at least 300 for us, if you cannot get more? If you have also inquired about golden pears for yourself, you have done well. When you depart, buy some knives for the servants and simple folk. And do not forget sugar.

I have today written to old Frau Köppel in Schlackenwalde to remind her not to forget about the flax; I sent along a dozen honeycakes to make it easier for her to remember.

Herr [Hieronymus] Kress has today gained another son. They now have five sons. They could well give one to us, if it were permitted. Finold lifted him from the baptismal waters.† His name is Joachim Friedrich. I have just been to the baptism.

Early tomorrow I am going with Christoph to run his bird traps.

I must share with you some real news about the weather here. For the last three days, praise God, we have had good weather; since your departure the weather had been constantly rainy. Had the rain lasted any longer, it would soon have incited something.‡ For whenever it has rained around here, the rains have been torrential.

I also heard today that people are beginning to die there [in Italy, from plague]. Therefore, I ask you, dearest treasure, to take care of yourself and not to travel without first having eaten something.

During the past week, I have also worried about your father, who has not been well. But, praise God, we

* The death of little Balthasar.

† That is, he was the godfather.

‡ Disease and plague, as well as flooding, were associated with incessant rainfall.

have today received word that he is again a little better. I regret that you are not here and that we cannot go and be with him, because the end is now surely approaching.

At this very moment, when I want only to write to you, a barrel of wine has arrived. And, as it is being put away, a letter from you has also just come, making me very happy. You will surely also by now have received my last letter. The barrel of wine that has just arrived contains almost 4 kegs [360 liters].

Since your departure, I have heard nothing from Adam Stutzer [about the horses], and he has not been at home. Perhaps the order [for the horses] has not yet come from Salzburg; therefore, I cannot well advise you to buy the horses [you desire in Frankfurt]. Should you bring the four horses [the two older browns and two new grays] together, a buyer may want to pay you that much less for the two browns. But it is your decision to make, and what pleases you also pleases me.

Dear Paumgartner, I also asked you in my first letter to get me 2 or 3 measures of linen—[at least] I believe I remembered to do so. You can get it for around 10 or 12 pazen a measure; I need it for a jerkin.

Dear love, I have at this time nothing more to write, except to report that our largest catch of birds on Sunday was 15. Today at 6:00 it began again to rain. May God give us good weather again soon!

Warm and sincere greetings, dearest Paumgartner; may the Lord God keep you in his grace.

Magdalena Balthasar Paumgartner

~~The unreliability of divine aid did not make Magdalena and Balthasar skeptics and anticlerics. Their personal experience of the "sovereignty of God" confirmed for them what their clergy had also taught: God may be implored, but he cannot be manipulated; he is all-powerful and free on the one hand, good and merciful on the other, and his daily rule on earth remains com-~~