Introduction

Saint Angela of Foligno, (1248 – 4 January 1309) was a Christian mystic who wrote extensively about her mystical revelations. She was a Franciscan tertiary and was known as "Mistress of Theologians".

She was noted not only for her spiritual writings, but also for founding a religious community which refused to accept becoming an enclosed religious order that it might continue her vision of caring for those in need.

Early life and conversion

Angela's birth date, which is not known with certainty, is often listed as 1248. She was born into a wealthy family at Foligno, in Umbria. Married, perhaps at an early age, she had several children. Angela reports that she loved the world and its pleasures. Around the age of 40, she reportedly had a vision of St. Francis and recognized the emptiness of her life. From that time, she began to lead a life devoted to higher perfection.

Three years later, her mother died, and a few months later her husband, and children. With one holy serving woman, Masazuola, as her companion, she began to divest herself of her possessions and to live as a penitent. Angela joined the Third Order of St. Francis probably in 1291. She placed herself under the direction of a Franciscan friar named Arnoldo, who would serve as her confessor.
Works

Considered a "great medieval mystic," she is said to have received mystical revelations, which she dictated to a scribe in the late 1200s. These accounts are contained in a compilation of two works, usually published under the title Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno.[4]

Angela recorded the history of her conversion in her "Book of Visions and Instructions". She dictated in her Umbrian dialect an account of her spiritual progress, known as the Memoriale, which was transcribed in Latin by a man known as "Brother A." This work was probably begun in 1292.[5]

Brother A. remained with her until 1296 while she completed the higher and more difficult final ten stages, but since it proved impossible for him to understand these fully, he condensed them into seven ‘supplementary stages’ whose description takes up the larger portion of the Memorial. The text was finished by 1298, and submitted to Cardinal James of Colonna and eight Franciscans, who gave it their approval. It seems that Brother A. revised it shortly after, in 1299-1300.[3]

Between around 1296 and her death in early 1309, the fame of Angela's sanctity gathered around her a number of other tertiaries, both men and women, who strove under her direction to advance in holiness. Later she established at Foligno a community of Sisters, who added to the Rule of the Third Order a commitment to a common life without, however, binding themselves to enclosure, so that they might devote their time to works of charity.

The final version of the Book appends a series of 36 Instructions to the Memorial.[1] These reflect Angela’s teaching during this period. These teachings are rather more conventional in tone and have differences in vocabulary and emphasis from the Memorial— which may reflect redaction by several hands. Nevertheless, the Instructions seem to reflect Angela’s teaching, albeit at some remove.[6] "No one can be saved without divine light. Divine light causes us to begin and to make progress, and it leads us to the summit of perfection. Therefore if you want to begin and to receive this divine light, pray. If you have begun to make progress, pray. And if you have reached the summit of perfection, and want to be super-illumined so as to remain in that state, pray. If you want faith, pray. If you want hope, pray. If you want charity, pray. If you want poverty, pray. If you want obedience, pray. If you want chastity, pray. If you want humility,
pray. If you want meekness, pray. If you want fortitude, pray. If you want any virtue, pray." ((from Voices of the Saints, Bert Ghezzi ))

"And pray in this fashion: always reading the Book of Life, that is, the life of the God-man, Jesus Christ, whose life consisted of poverty, pain, contempt and true obedience." ((from Voices of the Saints, Bert Ghezzi ))

At Christmas, 1308, Angela told her companions she would die shortly. A few days later Christ appeared to her, promising to come personally to take her to heaven. She died in her sleep on January 3, 1309.

Angela died surrounded by her community of disciples. Her remains repose in the Church of St. Francis at Foligno. Many people attributed miracles to her, which were accomplished at her tomb.[1]

References

4. Jump up^ "Angela of Foligno", Arizona State University
5. Jump up^ "Franciscan Women: History and Culture", St. Bonaventure University. |chapter= ignored (help)