

On the Divine Will Devotions, II

So again, this does not mean that her revelations were invalid or useless. But unless someone had a good knowledge of both High and Low German, and had copies of them, and knew which passages that Brentano had inserted, then using the book as a basis for the interior life would be problematic at best.

Getting back to the sanctity of the authors, realize that when the Church canonizes, she canonizes virtue – in particular heroic virtue – and not everything contained in their private revelations. Fr. Poulain, in his classic work, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, lists 32 saints and beatified servants of God who had significant errors mixed in with legitimate revelations, as well as bona fide miracles (one of my favorites is listed: St. Catherine of Siena). So just because someone is declared a Servant of God, or venerable, or blessed or a saint, it does not follow that their teachings must be accepted uncritically.

At the same time, just because someone finds an error in the teaching of a saint, or exaggerations, does it mean that the saint is less holy. What we must do is simply compare the teaching with the doctrine of the Catholic Church, the Magisterium, oral and written tradition. If the Church has defined something, and a saint says different, then we must accept the Church. It is she who has the privilege of infallibility, not a saint.

I should say at this point too, that if you look up the question of infallibility as applied to canonization in the old Catholic Encyclopedia, or the new one for that matter, you will find the predominant opinion of theologians to be that when a pope canonizes, he does so infallibly. However, there is a growing number of theologians who are questioning this. The reason they are questioning this is because the process of canonization was

developed over millennia, and had an extensive set of safeguards to it. The Devil's Advocate was a priest who tried his best to find faults in the case for canonization, but this office was discontinued. There used to be a long wait so that all the writings and testimonies could be examined with a fine tooth comb, as they say, but the wait has been done away with. *Santo Subito!* (sainthood now!) can be found on signs of demonstrators who want canonization to proceed (What do we want? Sainthood! When do we want it? Now!). The Church used to look for an indication of a healthy *cultus*, or culture, that grew up after the possible saint died; questions like "Are the faithful reading what he wrote? Are they making pilgrimages to his tomb? Are there institutes formed to study his life? If so, are these healthy and good?" There were many other things that used to be done which have been discarded, and thus the reliability of modern canonization is being questioned more and more.

The beatification by Pope Francis of Pope Paul VI is a case in point. I've looked around for biographies of Bl. Paul VI, and found one in English that is out of print, and one in French that's out of print. When I visited his tomb once, I was struck that no one was praying there. I knelt down to pray but was alone. There seems to be no *cultus* surrounding him, which is why many commentators think that the beatification was more political in nature, to bolster the credibility of the Second Vatican Council. Whatever the reason, I think it is quite possible to look at beatifications and canonizations in a different light than before. This does not mean that the declaration of Luisa Piccarreta as a Servant of God is invalid, nor of Bl. Paul VI. It's just harder in our times to know what this means.

Despite the approbation he wrote, Archbishop Cassati has specifically asked in writing (January of 1998) that public promotion (positive or negative) of Luisa's writings not be engaged in until the cause of beatification is submitted to Rome so that the Church can peacefully finish the process. This is a very prudent desire on the part of the Archbishop. This prudence seems to be largely ignored, since her works are being promoted by those who do not know Italian, and who do not have the ability to distinguish between a good translation and a poor one.

Notice, he presents no doubt about Luisa Piccarreta's sanctity, who wrote down the details of her revelations in obedience to her confessor. Rather, he is concerned that the works being disseminated are not accurate.

This is an important point. Trying to obtain a good version of any private revelations is often difficult. Take for example, the case of Maria Valtorta. In a letter to the editor to the *New Oxford Review*, Mr. Hurd Baruch (don't you love that name) replied to a writer concerned about the *Poem of the Man God*, another work based entirely on visions. What he wrote is much to the point here:

I know of very spiritual people who are convinced that Valtorta's visions are credible and edifying. Moreover, the book's distributor claims, in a pasted-in insert inside the front cover, that a type-written copy of the visions had been provided to Pope Pius XII, and that he had personally approved its publication (which he had the authority to do) in a private audience with three priest-theologians of the Order of the Servites of Mary, a decade before pope St. John XXIII placed it on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. (Fr. Mitch Pacwa disputes this

claim in his article "Is 'The Poem of the Man-God Simply a Bad Novel?' in *New Covenant*, Feb. 5³ 8).

If you know someone who relies upon that book in any way for their spiritual reading, then they should read Fr. Pacwa's article. Not only is there a big problem with translations of the book, but in any translation you'll find our Lord using a screwdriver in the carpenter shop. This is centuries before screwdrivers were invented. Or screws for that matter.

Another work comes from the visions of Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich. Mr. Hurd says of this:

Both the transcription and the translation of the visions of Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich cannot be verified. Her words were written down by one of the great Romantic poets of the time, Clement Brentano, over a period of six years, as he sat by her bedside from time to time. The Church always keeps in mind that the holiness of the recipient of a vision or locution is no guarantee that he or she did not err in what was perceived, or in how the perceptions were interpreted and then retransmitted by the recipient. For her part, Sister Emmerich did not claim that her visions had the accuracy of Scripture. According to Brentano's preface to his first edition of the *Dolorous Passion*, she herself considered her visions as having only a 'human and defective value.' Moreover, Clement Brentano at times inserted his own commentary, and, speaking of the compiled revelations as a whole, the dividing line between her revelations dictated in low German and his rendering of them in elegant language is not always clear.