

The Stigmata, I

vessels, and yet they bleed copious amounts of blood.

Someone with an open mind to the truth would also see that the stigmata are found only in persons who practice heroic virtues, and have a great love of the cross. They meditate and contemplate the moral and physical sufferings of Our Lord.

Take the case of St. Veronica Giuliani (I wonder if there is relation to Rudolf). The former mistress of novices who assisted her during the sufferings of the stigmatization gives the following striking testimony: "Her hands were bathed in blood. I examined them carefully to see where it was coming from, but there was no trace of wounds or of a scratch. I then took a compress to bathe her forehead, and, while doing so, I said interiorly: 'I beg Thee, O Lord, make me see where this blood is coming from, so that I can render testimony of this child.' And at the very instant there formed under my hands, a little above the right eyebrow, a hole which seemed to be made by a large thorn. From this hole gushed forth waves of blood. I continued to soak up the blood with a compress, but I noticed that the edges of the hole did not yield like those of an ordinary wound, and then it suddenly closed, or rather disappeared, leaving the skin smooth, without the slightest sign of a lesion. Only the omnipotence of God could in a few moments wound and heal without leaving the slightest trace." (Taken from the [Three Ages of the Interior Life](#) Vol. II by Fr. Garrigou LaGrange, O.P.)

The attempt to explain these things by the material cause only, while closing the eyes to the formal and final cause, is like defining a statue solely by the wood or marble from which it is made, forgetting its form, its true end, and the artist who had this end in mind. To put it another way, it is the attempt to reduce the superior cause to the material cause.

But to judge a human act fairly must include the meaning of an act and its import. For this, Catholic theologians use the famous expression: *Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando* (who, what, where, with whose help, why, in what way, and when). So we must pay attention to the *cur* or end, manifested either before by means of a promise or a prayer, or afterward by effects such as a great love of the cross. We ought to look at the things related to the object (*quid*) such as a great spiritual wound like that suffered by St. Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross, which produce great physical suffering. Those relating to the person (*quis*) has to do with whether he is humble, obedient and animated by great charity. Those relative to the means (*quibus auxiliis*) must exclude all trickery and occultism. And the things related to the time and place must also be considered (*ubi, quando*). If all these circumstances are favorable, then we may have moral certitude of the supernatural origin of the stigmata.

Only God can produce what is most lofty in stigmatization: the spiritual wound of the heart, about which St. Teresa speaks in the Sixth Mansion (Interior Castle). This wound is at the same time most painful and yet most delightful, and St. Teresa says that the soul would wish never to recover from it.

I want to write about some extraordinary things in the interior life, using Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange. The stigmata is fascinating, and unique, and can be a good source of apologetics for the Catholic Church.

Can suggestion or autosuggestion or any psychological means produce the stigmata, defined as the marks of Our Lord's passion, which a number of saints during ecstasy have received on their feet, hands, side and forehead, with intense sufferings extraordinarily reminiscent of those of Christ crucified? These wounds appear without having been caused by an exterior wound, and periodically fresh blood flows from them.

The first time this phenomenon appears in history is with St. Francis of Assisi. Perhaps there were other cases, but his is the first known case in history. It's mysterious as to why a millennia went by with no other cases. Since his day cases have multiplied, even in modern times.

And unbelievers – who are interested in "debunking" these cases – have sought natural explanations for the stigmata, but really only focus on one explanation, which is that the stigmata must be caused psychologically.

But there are great problems with trying to explain the phenomena with mere psychological causality. For even if it is admitted that something like hypnotic suggestion can produce the breaking of blood vessels and resultant bloody sweats, how does a hypnotic session or sessions produce lasting wounds, which are immune to infection and slow to heal?

Back in the '30s an expert hypnotist named Pierre Janet tried unsuccessfully to produce stigmata by suggestion. And every other attempt has failed as well. Blisters and mild

hemorrhages have been reproduced, but nothing like the stigmata. Fr. Louis Sempe, S.J., wrote about this in 1936, and pointed out that no matter what mild wounds have been caused by suggestion, these differ radically from what the Church accepts as the stigmata for these reasons:

1. The true stigmata are wounds which are always located in the same places on the body as they were in Christ, and are occasionally the same dimensions as they were in Christ.

2. These wounds are as rebellious to all medication as they are inaccessible to corruption. No dressing or procedure stops the bleeding, and the open wounds never become infected, with or without treatment, even though these wounds are exposed to the air for months and even years.

3. They occasionally heal suddenly and perfectly, to such a degree that the scar tissue is as elastic and strong as the surrounding tissue, though it is still possible to see the form and dimensions of the wound underneath the skin.

4. The true stigmata bleed periodically, depending on the liturgical feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady. They even bleed on days to which a liturgical feast has been transferred, contrary to the expectation of the subject who was unaware of the transference.

5. It has been observed repeatedly that when a stigmatic is lying on his back, the blood flows from the wounds in his feet as it flowed from Christ's wounds, and therefore in the direction contrary to gravity.

6. The abundance of hemorrhages is also unexplained. The wounds are generally on the surface, far from the large blood