

## **A Response to those who Publicly Oppose the Writings and Doctrines of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta**

This past week I received several requests to provide a theological response to the recent assertions that Catholics cannot gather in order to grow in the proper knowledge and devotion of the doctrines contained in the writings of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta. My addressing the matter is a duty the Church requests of her theologians and is contained in the CDF's Instruction, *Donum Veritatis, On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, arts. 20 and 30. To the extent that the theologian's vocation and duty require him "to investigate and explain the doctrine of the Faith" and "to preserve the sacred deposit of revelation, to examine it more deeply, to explain, teach, and defend it for the service of the People of God and for the whole world's salvation,"<sup>1</sup> I provide the below response.

### **Canon Law Grants the Christian Faithful the Right to Gather**

Can. 215 of the Church's Code of Canon law, which all clerics and laity are bound to uphold, states: "*The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and direct associations for purposes of charity or piety or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world and to hold meetings for the common pursuit of these purposes.*"

This canon relates that one cannot prohibit the Christian faithful from holding meetings or gathering to pray, read spiritual literature, share, etc., so long as these meetings adhere to those teachings and devotions that are in conformity with Magisterial teaching. Furthermore, insofar as several of Luisa's published works enjoy the seals of approval of the same Magisterium that remain in full effect today, e.g., *The Hours of the Passion*, *The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will*, etc., one cannot prohibit Christian faithful from forming or attending meetings that, while adhering to Magisterial teaching, devote themselves to reading, meditating and sharing the doctrine contained in the writings of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta.

However, if what is being taught or observed in these gatherings contradicts Magisterial teaching, a bishop or a cleric delegated by him may with charity intervene for the spiritual welfare of the faithful, to ensure that canon 223 §2 is not neglected, e.g., he may provide, as is incumbent upon him, proper theological guidance or, if those attending said gatherings refuse such guidance or compliance with the Magisterium, he may request that such gatherings desist.

I wish to emphasize the Magisterial teaching that the theologian Fr. Jordan Aumann and Raymond Cardinal Burke have in recent years reiterated, i.e., *it is "reprehensible" for one to*

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<sup>1</sup> *International Theological Commission, the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975.

*oppose publicly a work that bears the Church's official seals of approval.*<sup>2</sup> In a work bearing the Imprimatur, Cardinal Raymond Burke relates, “While the freedom remains for a member of the Church to reject a private revelation which has received official ecclesiastical approval, it would be at the same time reprehensible to speak publicly against it.”

## **The Magisterium and the Vocation of the Theologian**

It is noteworthy that the Magisterium extends from the Roman Pontiff to the bishops in communion with him,<sup>3</sup> who always consult with her “qualified theologians”<sup>4</sup> – all of whom are bound by the “sensus fidei” (supernatural appreciation of the Faith) of the Church of this and previous times.<sup>5</sup> All of these have their respective functions: the bishops “protect divine revelation” and the theologians “investigate and explain the doctrine of the Faith.”<sup>6</sup>

As a ‘qualified theologian’ of the Catholic Church I successfully demonstrated in my doctoral dissertation of the Pontifical University of Rome, which is authorized by the Holy See, that the doctrines contained in Luisa’s writings contain nothing contrary to faith and morals. The same conclusion was arrived at on December 18, 1997 in the theological evaluation submitted to the Diocesan Tribunal by Fr. Cosimo Reho, Professor of Dogmatic Theology, and Fr. Antonio Resta, Rector of the Pontifical Theological Institute of Southern Italy, who submitted his report to the same Tribunal on June 2, 1997.

This notwithstanding, certain clerics and lay persons who are neither Church-qualified theologians of dogmatic or spiritual theology, nor conversant in the original Italian language in which Luisa wrote, choose to express personal verdicts on Luisa’s writings. These, more often than not, attempt to interpret post-biblical prophetic revelations whilst failing to observe the Pontiff’s encyclical, in which he exhorts them to “better understand what the inspired author wishes to express”<sup>7</sup> (intention) and consider their “setting in life” (context) before pronouncing judgment on them. Such individuals limit the interpretation of the prophetic text to the pure letter, thereby divesting it of intentionality and context. This type of approach constitutes a form

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<sup>2</sup> Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, Christian Classics, 1980, p. 492; *Mariology, A Guide for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians and Consecrated Persons*, bearing the Imprimatur of the Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke, and the Nihil Obstat of Fr. Peter Felner, F.I., 2007, Queenship Pub. CA, p. 830

<sup>3</sup> “The bishops, when they are teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to the divine and catholic truth... The religious assent of the will and intellect is to be given in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Pontiff even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*” (Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council I, vol. II, Washington DC [1990], *De perpetuitate primatus beati Petri in Romanis pontificibus*, cap. II-IV, p. 869).

<sup>4</sup> *International Theological Commission, the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, and *Donum Veritatis, On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, op. cit., 33-34.

of *rationalism* or *theological pragmatism*, which espouses the following errors: a) the interpretation of the literal prophetic word; b) the dismissal of the ‘analogy of faith’ (i.e., every individual statement of the text is interpreted in the light of the whole objective body of the text); c) the non-acceptance of human error in the transmission of God’s revealed word (a refusal to acknowledge the influences St. Hannibal di Francia articulates, which are responsible for the prophet’s unintentional human error); d) inattentiveness to the disparity between the profound theological doctrine contained within prophetic text and the lack of doctrinal education of the prophet; e) a de-emphasis of the prophet’s habitual exercise of the virtues, rectitude of moral life, mental balance, honesty, habitual sincerity, frequent reception of the Sacraments, etc.<sup>8</sup> The dismissal of these important criteria in the examination of post-biblical prophetic texts gives rise to false criticisms.

With respect to the above error “c)”, consider the prophetic revelations of St. Catherine of Siena that bear the Church’s seals of approval, which at one time contained the unintentional error of denying Mary’s Immaculate Conception. Fr. William G. Most relates, “*Benedict XIV* (*‘On Heroic Virtue’* III. 53, n. 16) examines an ecstasy of 1377 of St. Catherine of Siena, in which the Blessed Virgin seems to deny the Immaculate Conception. Benedict quotes some authors who try to blame editors or directors. But it is very possibly her preconceived ideas - Dominican opposition to Immaculate Conception - really caused the ‘vision’. A true revelation may later be altered involuntarily by the recipient. This happens especially with intellectual locutions which need to be translated into words. Again, God may seem to promise a cure without saying if it is total or partial, sudden or slow, or even physical or moral. Again if a revelation is received in an instant, but it takes long to write it all down. St. Bridget admits such a thing in her own case.”<sup>9</sup>

Consider also the prophetic revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden that also bear the Church’s seals of approval, but that at one time contained the unintentional error that denies the indelible character of the Priesthood. Pope Benedict XIV relates that such an error ought to be read favourably and within the proper context:

“...the fourth book of the revelations of St. Bridget, where Christ addresses the saint, and complains of the wicked priests: ‘They have lost the key by which they ought to open heaven to the miserable.’ And also to the passage in the seventh book, where we read this: ‘I say that all those priests who are not heretics, although otherwise full of many sins, are true priests, and truly consecrate the Body of Christ My Son.’ A favourable and pious interpretation is to be given to these words; namely, that wicked priests have lost the key by which they ought to open heaven to the miserable,’ not because they do not validly absolve, if they use the power which has been

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Jerome Hamer, O.P., Cardinal Francis Seper, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Fr. William G. Most, *Mary in Our Life, Our Lady on Doctrine and Devotion*, Appendix: Discernment of Spirits, Angelus Press, nn. 3-4, 1959.

*given them with due intention on the proper matter, together with the form, but because the administration is by law forbidden to wicked priests... ”<sup>10</sup>*

Apropos of St. Bridget, St. Hannibal di Francia relates in a 1925 letter to Bishop Liviero of Città di Castello, “*Being taught by the teachings of several mystics, I have always deemed that the teachings and locutions of even holy persons, especially women may contain deceptions. Poulain attributes errors even to saints the Church venerates on the altars. How many contradictions we see between Saint Brigitte, [Venerable] Mary of Agreda, [Blessed] Catherine Emmerich, etc. We cannot consider the revelations and the locutions as words of Scripture. Some of them must be omitted, and others explained in a right, prudent meaning.*”

It is theologically demonstrated that the errors initially discovered in (and removed by the theologian before the printing of) the many prophetic texts that were later granted the Church’s seals of approval, are contradicted with sound doctrinal truths in the same prophetic texts.<sup>11</sup> And yet many a critic has erred in condemning a prophet for a doctrinal error without having first cross-referenced said text in its original language, and without having interviewed or sought clarification on the intentionality from the recipient of said revelation. These important steps were taken by numerous competent Catholic Bishops and appointed priests in Luisa’s day.<sup>12</sup> For

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict XIV, *Heroic Virtue: A Portion of the Treatise of Benedict XIV on the Beatification and Canonization of the Servants of God*, vol. III, London, T. Richardson and Son Pub., 1852, pp. 398-399.

<sup>11</sup> St. Hannibal founded the Rogationist Fathers and the Sisters of Divine Zeal, and he was the spiritual director of many mystics, including the seer of La Salette, Melanie Calvat, and the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta. In the following passage, he emphasizes the importance of the Church’s “learned writers” or theologians who are to remove such errors before the prophetic revelation is published and read by the faithful. In a letter to Fr. Peter Bergamaschi who had published all the unedited writings of a renowned Benedictine mystic, Sr. M. Cecilia of Montefiascone (1694-1766), Hannibal criticizes his decision to publish them:

*“Conforming to prudence and sacred accuracy, people cannot deal with private revelations as if they were canonical books or decrees of the Holy See. Even the most enlightened persons, especially women, may be greatly mistaken in the visions, revelations, locutions, and inspiration. More than once has the divine operation been restrained by human nature. For example, who could ratify in full all the visions of Catherine Emmerich and St. Brigitte, which show evident discrepancies? I love the private revelations of holy persons, but I never accept everything.*

*Were I to publish revelations, I would eliminate or revise what is inconsistent with a sound criterion, or reliable tradition, or opinions of sacred, learned writers. I think of behaving prudently... My dear father, to consider any expression of the private revelations as dogma or propositions near of faith is always imprudent!... This is proved by experience, by the mystical theologians, such as St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, Castrotvere, Poulain, etc... We cannot consider their revelations and the locutions as words of Scripture. Some of them must be omitted, and others explained in a right, prudent meaning.”*

<sup>12</sup> Archbishop Thomas de Stefano, 1898-1906 (Luisa’s bishop when she began to write her Diary); Archbishop Giulio Vaccaro, 1906 (Administrator); Archbishop Francis P. Carraro, 1906-1915; Archbishop John Regime, 1915-1918; Archbishop Eugene Tosi, 1918-1920 (Administrator); Archbishop Joseph M. Leo, 1920-1939 (granted his *Imprimatur* to Luisa’s first 19 volumes); St. Hannibal di Francia (Luisa’s censor librorum and confessor appointed by Archbishop Joseph Leo: granted the *Nihil Obstat* to Luisa’s first 19 volumes); the Episcopal Curia of Montepulciano (granted the *Imprimatur* to Luisa’s text on *The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will*); Joseph Blandamura, Delegate of the Archbishop of Taranto: granted the *Nihil Obstat* to the same text on *The*

true theology is not a matter of pure literary critique; it is above all receptivity to the prophetic text that – if faithful to the Deposit of Faith and interpreted in light of the prophet’s setting in life and intentionality – reveals the face of Christ, the Word of the Father, whom the reader contemplates.

### **The dangers of interpreting Luisa’s writings without proper theological guidance**

It is unfortunate that certain groups and individuals devoted to Luisa seek to interpret her writings without any ecclesial guidance and, at times, contrary to Magisterial teaching. While many of these individuals may be well-intentioned, others are less so. Some have taken to blogs in which they schismatically and openly defy the Magisterium: they refuse submission of the intellect and will to the Roman Pontiff’s official teachings and to those of the bishops in union with him, while claiming they are defending Luisa. Such as these are deceived.

Of the contributing factors that have led to what may be referred to as a freelance approach in the interpretation of Luisa’s writings noteworthy are the following: 1) All present-day unofficial translations in circulation were penned by translators who lack theological competency, qualification by the Church and the proper theological terminology without which one cannot properly understand the intended meaning of Luisa’s text; 2) These translations contain many grammatical errors and some doctrinal errors – not on account of Luisa’s writings, but on account of said translations. How proceed beyond this impasse? The Christian faithful ought to follow the Magisterium and seek out what the Vatican document refers to as “Church-qualified theologians” whose vocation is “to investigate and explain the doctrine of the Faith” and “to preserve the sacred deposit of revelation, to examine it more deeply, to explain, teach, and defend it for the service of the People of God and for the whole world’s salvation.”<sup>13</sup>

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*Blessed Virgin Mary*); Msgr. Francis M. della Cueva S. M., Delegate of the Archbishop of Taranto (granted the *Nihil Obstat* to Luisa’s text on *The Blessed Virgin Mary*); Francesco Sorrentino of Naples (censor: granted the *Imprimatur* to Luisa’s text on *Hours of the Passion*); Antonio Laviano (Vicar General: granted the *Imprimatur* to Luisa’s text on *The Hours of the Passion*); D. Prestifillipo, SJ of Messina (censor: granted the *Nihil Obstat* to Luisa’s text on *The Hours of the Passion*); Delegate to the Archbishop Joseph Blandamura of Taranto (granted the *Nihil Obstat* to Luisa’s text on *The Hours of the Passion*); Msgr. Michael Samarelli (Vicar General of Bari); Msgr. Ernest Balducci (Vicar General of Salerno); Msgr. Lewis D’Oria (Spiritual Director of the regional Seminary of Molfetta and Vicar General of Trani); Frs. Loiodice, Michael De Benedictis (Luisa’s official confessor appointed by Bishop Joseph. Dottula); Gennaro di Gennaro, Francis De Benedictis, Felix Torelli, Benedict Calvi, Ciccio Bevilacqua and other priests.

Archbishop Francis Petronelli; Msgr. Michael Samarelli: Vicar General of Bari; Msgr. Ernest Balducci: Vicar General of Salerno; Msgr. Lewis D’Oria.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. footnotes 1, 4-6.

## **The prohibition of certain groups devoted to Luisa**

As for the decision of a few episcopates to prohibit in their respective dioceses certain lay groups from promoting interpretations of the poor translations of Luisa's writings, noteworthy is Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick of the Seoul Archdiocese in South Korea and, more recently, Bishop James Golka of Colorado Springs.

First, Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick. In 2023 and based on the opinion reached by the Committee of the Korean Bishops' Conference, he prohibited the continuation of a lay group devoted to Luisa and revoked permission to publish books related thereto on account of doctrinal and spiritual errors. Reasons that precipitated this prohibition included concerns that those who attended this group "unintentionally spread false devotion or cause confusion in the Church;" "in this book, through the 'Fiat' project, Piccarreta is elevated to a special position in the history of salvation, comparable to, and even surpassing, Jesus and the Virgin Mary;" presenting Luisa as "opening up a new era of salvation in the church," which "subordinates Christ's work of salvation."

I wish to emphasize that the Korean bishops' concerns appear to be well founded, as nowhere in Luisa's original Italian text will one find the above false teachings, which appear to be the result of a lack of proper theological guidance.

Second, Bishop James Golka. In his recent letter of 2024 he refers to the cause being temporarily on pause and, citing "publicly" from an alleged "confidential" letter of April 18, 2024, prohibits the dissemination of her writings and the gathering of any groups meeting to study and promote them. He adds, however perplexingly, that Luisa's writings have "doctrinal errors" despite the fact that neither the Vatican, nor the Archdiocese entrusted with her cause nor the confidential letter he publicly cites attribute 'doctrinal errors' to her original Italian texts, several of which enjoy the Church's present-day official seals of approval. I think it is fair to affirm that no one would presume to assert that the many learned and holy Catholic bishops and commissioned priests of Luisa's lifetime and that are cited in footnote twelve were somehow all blindly misled in their careful and positive assessment of her text. Rather the letter the good bishop cites refers to "difficulties" – not 'doctrinal errors' – which may be clarified and resolved with theological contributions and clarifications. Consider, for example, the 'difficulties' identified by the Vatican in the writings of St. Faustina Kowalska and Blessed Antonio Rosmini, all of which were later, through theological contributions, clarified, resolved and approved. It would appear to me that the good bishop intended to express that if doctrinal errors exist, they are not to be found in Luisa's original text, but in its poor present-day translations.

Thus the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints and the Doctrine of Faith have determined that in this period of reflection, a deeper study of and contributions by theologians is required to clarify some of Luisa's expressions and language, the result of her limited education, dialect, cultural milieu, environment and religious ethos of the life of the community in which she wrote.

I hope this information has been helpful.

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July 22, 2024