

**What the Catholic Church says about Luisa Piccarreta**  
**Does the Catholic Church Condemn Luisa**  
**Piccarreta's Writings?**  
Stephen Patton, M.A., J.D.

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Do you remember the old saying we all learned in grade school, "Don't believe everything you read"? It stands as true today as ever. Beginning in the fall of 1997 many people read a few articles in the American Catholic press that misled them to believe that the Catholic Church condemns the writings of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta. As a result, many who had found great treasures in her spiritual writings stopped reading them. Others unleashed a firestorm of abuse toward those who continued to read them. All of this has been quite unjust, because it simply is not true that the Catholic Church condemns Luisa's writings. Catholics are free to read them. Here's the complete story.

**The Vatican's 1938 Condemnation**

In their attempts to show that the Church condemns Luisa's writings, her critics point out that in 1938 the Vatican placed three books associated with her name on what was known as the Index of Forbidden Books. (*Note: the article "Interesting Facts about Luisa and her writings" – located at the end of this article – has more specific information about the books in question*) This was a serious matter to be sure. But the complete picture includes some important facts that Luisa's critics routinely avoid mentioning.

1. *The 1938 condemnation had nothing whatsoever to do with Luisa's 36 volume spiritual diary, known as "Book of Heaven," which is her most important work.* This work of 40 years, containing the overwhelming weight of her spiritual doctrine on the Divine Will, was never placed on the Index. This is especially significant because in 1938 Vatican officials not only knew about this exhaustive work, they also had the actual, original volumes in the Vatican archives! If they had ever wanted to "condemn" this work of Luisa, that would have been the time. But they didn't. And so, no taint of condemnation has ever been upon the most important thing that Luisa wrote. In fact the official, Church appointed censor, gave the Nihil Obstat to the first 19 volumes of the "Book of Heaven" after examining them intently in their original Italian language over a period of 17 years, prior to his death. The archbishop who appointed this censor gave his handwritten Imprimatur directly on those original manuscripts.

2. Regarding the three books that were placed on the Index in 1938, two of them had several other editions. The condemnation was limited only to the specific editions officially mentioned. Other editions of these same two books have been published with full ecclesiastic approval, even as late as 1997. The third work was a compilation of edited extracts from Luisa's writings, which has never been reprinted.

3. The Vatican itself abolished the Index of Forbidden Books in 1966. This means that it no longer has any binding effect on Catholics. In abolishing the Index the Vatican advised Catholics still to be "on guard" about all the books that were on the Index, but also told us that from that point forward, regarding these books, "the Church trusts in the mature conscience of the faithful." In a word, there was no longer any "condemnation." This clearly means that, as to these three books attributed to Luisa, Holy Mother Church now tells us, to paraphrase, "You're perfectly free to read them. Just be careful; I trust you."

4. Actually it would be pretty hard for us to read any of these three books anyway, even if we wanted to. Why? Because none of the condemned editions are in print, not even in the Italian original. Every book of Luisa's writings that is currently in print, at least in English and by the Center for the Divine Will, has been translated only from versions fully approved by the Church.

Luisa's critics might reply that all that's fine, but the fact remains that three of the works, even if not all of them, were once placed on the Vatican's Index and never specifically taken off. They take this to mean that there is still some lingering Vatican disapproval of her and her writings. Some even take it as a lingering "condemnation,"

despite the Vatican's own clear language to the contrary in 1966. But is there really any lingering disapproval of any kind by the Vatican? It seems from an official statement by the Vatican in 1994 that the answer is no.

### **The Vatican's 1994 Non Obstare**

Before a bishop can begin an investigation for any person's Cause of Beatification he must first obtain permission from the Vatican, otherwise known as the Holy See. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints grants this permission on behalf of the Holy See only after consulting all the other appropriate Curial offices of the Vatican to determine whether there are any objections to the candidate's cause proceeding.

Following this requirement the Most Reverend Carmelo Cassati, Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglia, the archdiocese in which Luisa died, sought permission from the Vatican to proceed with her Cause. By way of an official letter dated February 24, 1994, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declared, "on the part of the Holy See the NON OBSTARE for the opening of the Cause of Beatification of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta."

The meaning here is certain: *No office of the Holy See, including the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which issued the original 1938 condemnation, considered that condemnation to present an impediment for Luisa Piccarreta being declared a saint.* In other words, the Holy See does not now consider that what Luisa contributed to the three books they originally placed on the Index, much less anything else she wrote, contains anything against faith and morals. If they thought otherwise, they would have objected to the diocese proceeding with what would amount to a hopeless Cause. The irony is that those who insist that the Holy See still "condemns" or even "disapproves" Luisa's writings are contradicting the obvious meaning of the Holy See's own official statement in 1994.

### **A Similar Case: Blessed (now Saint) Padre Pio**

Does the fact that the Holy See does not "condemn" Luisa or her writings mean that they "approve" them beyond the approvals given by her archdiocese? Not necessarily. Sometimes, officially speaking, the Holy See is just "neutral" about such matters. And in some instances, over time the Holy See changes its mind. The case of Blessed (now Saint) Padre Pio presents a good illustration.

Early in the twentieth century this holy but sometimes misunderstood friar was silenced by Pope Pius XI and forbidden to receive visitors. His ministry was, in a word, "condemned." Eventually the ban was lifted, and he was allowed once again to minister to penitents. Furthermore, after his death the Holy See eventually declared the "Non Obstare" for his Cause of Beatification to proceed. But none of this yet amounted to their outright, official "approval" of him or his ministry. They just became officially "neutral." As far as the Vatican was concerned, Catholics could take Padre Pio or leave him.

But that all changed when Padre Pio was declared Venerable in 1997. By papal decree Padre Pio's virtues were henceforth to be held by all Catholics as heroic. Furthermore, Catholics were definitively assured that none of Padre Pio's writings contained any matter against faith and morals. In a word, he was finally, officially, "approved" by the Catholic Church.

From the Vatican's viewpoint Luisa's sanctity and her writings are presently in the same sort of "neutral" category. The Catholic Church does not yet officially give them her full "approval," but neither does she "condemn" them. As far as the Vatican is concerned, it is with Luisa Piccarreta now as it was with Padre Pio before he was declared Venerable; Catholics are free to take or leave her and her writings.

### **Indications of Official Catholic "Approval"**

Since she has not yet been declared "Venerable" there is nothing that yet amounts to formal Vatican "approval" of Luisa's writings. But there are certainly favorable indications about them from the lower, diocesan level of

Catholic authority. These indications should, at the very minimum, help Catholics be confident that they are not out of line with the Church if they read and enjoy her writings.

1. First is the mere fact of Luisa's Cause of Beatification. Bishops typically will only put forward a candidate if he or she has a clear history of being an exemplary Catholic in every way, most especially in obedience and submission to the Church and her teachings. There is no question about either in Luisa's case. The historical record shows that she wrote her spiritual diary only in obedience to her bishop and the priests he assigned to her; she would never have written it otherwise. Moreover, she submitted everything she wrote to their continuous review and censorship.

2. In 1926 the first 19 volumes of Luisa's spiritual diary, as mentioned above, were published with the Imprimatur of Archbishop Joseph Leo and the Nihil Obstat of Blessed (now Saint) (Fr.) Hannibal Di Francia. These are official statements from the Catholic diocese in which a book is published certifying 1) that it is being published with the permission of the local bishop and 2) that there is nothing in it contrary to faith and morals. They are given as reliable guides to the Catholic faithful. Since they have never been removed, Catholics may still rely upon them. Now, some special mention should be made of Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal Di Francia's approval.

### **Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal Di Francia and Luisa's Writings**

In addition to being appointed by Bishop Leo to be the censor of her writings, Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal Di Francia was also Luisa's extraordinary confessor for 17 years. Not only did he find nothing contrary to Catholic faith or morals in her writings, he, a priest widely renowned for spiritual discernment, also found them to be of immense spiritual value. His published letters to her indicate his deep appreciation for her spiritual doctrine, and his dedication to promoting it.

American critics who have recently written that Luisa's writings contradict the Catholic Faith, in effect pit their opinions against Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal's. "His opinion is not infallible," they might say. But let's not forget, neither is theirs. And think for a minute – Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal knew Luisa personally and interpreted what she wrote only in the context of both her cultural background and her life as a whole. Who among her critics can claim the same? Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal also read every word of her spiritual diary (until his death in 1927) in the Italian original, and not just a few selected, translated passages. Who among her critics can claim the same? With all of these factors in mind, whose opinion, Blessed (now Saint) Hannibal's or theirs, is probably more reliable?

### **Understanding Archbishop Cassati's Moratorium on Public Promotion**

In January 1998 Archbishop Carmelo Cassati, then the archbishop in charge of Luisa's cause, asked for a moratorium on public promotion of her spirituality. He did this to restore the tranquility and respect proper to the process of Luisa's Cause. He also mentioned the "poor or exaggerated explanations of her writings" that had sometimes been given by some of her promoters. He emphasized that it "is the task of those who explain her doctrine to others... to reconcile it with the teaching of the Church," and that "a period of time for reflection" would be helpful in this regard. I wish to bring out two matters regarding his wise request.

1. Archbishop Cassati did not question the doctrinal correctness of Luisa's original writings, only the manner in which some of her promoters had explained them. This is certainly prudent advice. We must be careful to interpret and "promote" even Scripture itself only in harmony with Church teaching. A spirituality as profound as Luisa's needs the same kind of care.

2. Specifically in response to Archbishop Cassati's request to "reconcile (Luisa's doctrine) with the teaching of the Church," on February 11, 1999 the Center for the Divine Will published a detailed treatise I had written entitled "The Orthodoxy of Luisa Piccarreta's Writings: A Response to Certain Doctrinal Objections." It was a point-by-point rebuttal of each critic and organization that had published negative opinions about Luisa.\* With

the hopes of engaging an open theological dialogue that would be helpful to everyone concerned, I mailed copies to each one of them. In the seventeen months since then I have received scarcely any response.

### **Summary: The Catholic Church Allows Us to Read and Enjoy Luisa**

I have shown in this short paper that the Catholic Church does not condemn either Luisa Piccarreta or her writings. There is absolutely no doubt that the Vatican's current, official position is neutral. This is evidenced most especially by the fact that six years ago Holy Mother Church allowed, and She continues to allow, Luisa's Cause of Beatification to proceed.

The Archbishop promoting Luisa's Cause is doing so in strict accord with Canon Law and in complete harmony with Rome. This includes a careful and comprehensive review of Luisa's writings by competent, independent experts in theology.

Catholics should know once and for all that published opinions of critics are just that – opinions. They are not binding upon the consciences of Catholics. They do not represent the authority of the Catholic Church. We are free to disagree with them. In short, this is a matter that is open for discussion in the Catholic Church. And so... *If anyone claims or implies that the Catholic Church condemns Luisa Piccarreta or any of her writings, he is either intentionally or unintentionally a purveyor of falsehood.*

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### **Interesting Facts about Luisa and her writings**

In May of 1938, following a persecution of Luisa by certain parties, and in a time when the Vatican was clamping down on the many reported mystics of that time, including Padre Pio, who was condemned by Pope Pius XI, a delegate was sent from the then Holy Office to Luisa's home in Corato, Italy, to confiscate three works associated with Luisa's name, which had been edited, changed, and published by her last confessor, Don Benedetto Calvi. These three works were definitely not the volumes of the Book of Heaven, which had not been published. The three published works were: "The Hours of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ with a treatise on the Divine Will" "The Queen of Heaven in the Kingdom of the Divine Will," and a compilation of passages from Luisa's first four volumes with the title, "In the Kingdom of the Divine Will." **Remember these three works were not as originally written by Luisa, but were edited and changed by Don Benedetto Calvi.**

The delegate from the Holy Office did not report his presence or mission to the ordinary of the diocese. During the episode at Luisa's house, when the delegate from the Holy Office was collecting the copies of the three works, Luisa remained calm, but the delegate also took her private diary – the notebooks of the volumes of the Book of Heaven! He took volumes 1 through 34. The matter of his authority to take these volumes is obscure, but it is believed by those close to the history of Luisa's life that this delegate did not have any authority to take those volumes, which were her personal, private property. Volume 35 was overlooked, and volume 36 was only in the beginning stage. Luisa wrote a letter to be sent to the Holy Office, submitting herself totally to the decisions of the Church, stating that she would condemn whatever the Church condemned and approve whatever the Church approved. Her Archbishop told her that it was not necessary to send that letter.

Three months later, an unsigned article appeared in the *Osservatore Romano*, stating that the three above-mentioned works had been placed on the Index of Forbidden Books due to false spirituality and extravagant terms, etc.; but, significantly, no explanation was given of any error against Catholic Faith or Morals. Here, we are reminded of the 19-year condemnation of the writings on the Divine Mercy by Blessed (now Saint) Sr. Faustina of Poland.

The 34 volumes of the Book of Heaven were consigned to the archives of the Holy Office, now called The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, under the current (now past) leadership of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

(now Pope Benedict XVI). Providentially, these writings were carefully wrapped in protective paper and maintained in perfect condition to await another day in God's providence.

In 1967 the Index of Forbidden Books was abolished by Pope Paul VI. Juridical penalties for reading the books on the Index were removed, but the moral requirements remained, namely not to expose one's self to the occasion of sins against faith or morals. This requirement always exists. The Vatican no longer has a procedure for reviewing all the publications concerning religious content. From time to time, certain writings are investigated by the Vatican with juridical penalties for those disapproved by the Vatican.

In late 1993, Cardinal (now Pope Benedict XVI) Ratzinger's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, investigated the condemnation of the three works associated with Luisa's name, as well as the history of her writings, and found nothing to impede the process for Luisa's Cause of Beatification from going forward. In fact all the Sacred Congregations of the Vatican concurred that there was nothing to impede Luisa's Cause from going forward. It is always difficult to know with precision the inner workings and decisions of Vatican offices, but it has been said that Cardinal (now Pope Benedict XVI) Ratzinger's office has cleared the record concerning the three condemned books, possibly having them specifically removed from the old Index. **What is certain is that Luisa's name has been cleared of any stigma attached to the 1938 condemnation, and no Vatican office had any objection to opening her Cause for Beatification.** If there had been any question of danger to Catholic Faith or Morals, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would never have consented to the opening of Luisa's Cause for Beatification. In fact, Archbishop Cassati, who is completely informed on the entire matter, recommended an attentive study of Luisa's writings in a Pastoral Letter dated January 23, 1997. (*See Decree, Edict and other letters that follow this article*)

On March 28, 1994, Angelo Cardinal Felici, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Cause of the Saints, signed an official letter to Archbishop Carmelo Cassati of the Archdiocese where Luisa lived, stating that he was pleased to notify him that there was no objection on the part of the Vatican to the opening of Luisa Piccarreta's Cause of Beatification and that he had formal permission to do so. Luisa's Cause was opened on the Feast of Christ the King, November 20, 1994.

In January of 1996, Cardinal (now Pope Benedict XVI) Ratzinger released the 34 Volumes of the Book of Heaven to Archbishop Cassati as part of the protocol for process of Luisa's Cause of Beatification. A team went to the archives of (then) Cardinal (now Pope Benedict XVI) Ratzinger's office and spent 4 days photocopying and photographing the 34 volumes, finishing the project on February 2, 1996. The originals were in perfect condition and were returned to the archives. The photocopies were taken to the Archdiocese of Trani and placed under the custodianship of Archbishop Cassati.

Concerning the original Volumes 35 and 36, they are in the custody of a certain priest in Florida, who has submitted photocopies of them to Archbishop Cassati.

**In March of 1997, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Luisa's death, it was announced publicly that the Tribunal Responsible for Luisa's Cause had determined unanimously that Luisa's life was one of heroic virtue and that her mystical experiences were authentic. Also, in 1997, due to the Beatification process, two independent, highly qualified theologians commissioned by the Church to review Luisa's writings submitted their reports stating that they found nothing contrary to Catholic Faith or Morals.** There may possibly be even more theological reviews before Luisa's Cause goes to Rome.

In summary, the record is entirely clear concerning the writings of Luisa Piccarreta. Anyone can read them with a clear conscience and be completely at peace. May God receive all the Glory He deserves and has determined to receive from his Creation, a subject which is most beautifully brought to our attention in the Book of Heaven.