

In Response to Various Questions Regarding "The Poem of the Man-God"

The following observations are offered towards a more accurate understanding of the present Church status of *The Poem of the Man-God*, (1) a series of reported private revelations received by the Italian mystic, Maria Valtorta, regarding the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. These observations are offered as an initial response to various specific critiques which suggest that present status of *The Poem* is morally comparable to a "forbidden book." (2)

It has been objected that Pope Pius XII never gave approval for *The Poem of the Man-God* since it was not printed in the February 27, 1948 edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, which documented the papal audience of Pius XII with Father Migliorini, Father Berti and Father Cecchin, spiritual directors and custodians of *The Poem of the Man-God*. There is no substantial reason to doubt the oral statement granted by Pope Pius XII during a papal audience given to the spiritual director of Maria Valtorta, Father Romuald Migliorini, O.S.M., Father Berti, O.S.M., and Father Andrea Cecchin, Prior of the Order of the Servants of Mary (papal audience, February 26, 1948; *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 27, 1948), (3) whereby they record the words of the pope saying "Publish this work as it is. There is no need to give an opinion about its origin, whether it be extraordinary or not. Who reads it, will understand. One hears of many visions and revelations. I will not say they are all authentic; but there are some of which it could be said that they are." Speculations on "how much was read" by Pius XII whether in "whole or in part" posed to undermine the oral statement of Pius XII, as faithfully transmitted by the Prior of the Order of the Servites of Mary would represent speculation without factual foundation.

The objection has also been posed that Father Béa, recognized Vatican scripture expert, only read part of *The Poem* manuscript. Father Béa, who eventually became Cardinal Béa, rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Vatican II father, and Chairman of several Vatican biblical commissions, offered his testimony that "as far as exegesis is concerned, I did not find any errors in the parts I examined." (4) To infer from this statement that he failed to read the parts of *The Poem* that do contain doctrinal or exegetical problems in it, is again mere conjecture without factual foundation.

Doubt has been cast on whether or not one can licitly read *The Poem* because it had previously been placed on the Index of Forbidden Books by the Holy Office. The placing of *The Poem* on the Index should not be connoted to be a direct papal act by Pope John XXIII. That the Holy Father was informed of the action would be an appropriate conclusion. That the Holy Father personally read, analyzed and concluded to its need to be placed on the Index would be beyond the evidence. Nonetheless, obedience to the decrees of the Holy Office in reference to the Forbidden Book Index while the Index was in existence was required and should have been strictly observed. The issue of obedience or disobedience regarding the initial publication of *The Poem* constitutes an entirely separate issue from the relevant theological issue of the inherent doctrinal integrity and orthodoxy of *The Poem* text itself.

The dissolution of the Index of Forbidden Books in 1966 denotes *a priori* that there is no longer any book canonically forbidden by the Church to be read under penalty of disobedience. While books can be deemed doctrinally erroneous by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the dissolution of the Index by the Holy Office itself makes clear that there no longer remains any book the reading of which by members of the Faith would in itself constitute an act of canonical or ecclesiastical disobedience.

To conclude, therefore, that the reading of *The Poem* due to its previous placing on the Index is to be disobedient to the Church would be to put forward inordinately a restriction beyond the current restrictions which the Magisterium in general and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in specific have put forth.

The 1966 statement of the Holy Office that the "Index retains its moral force despite its dissolution" may call the Catholic reader to special diligence and discernment in examining works previously found on the Index. However, this should not be inappropriately extended to support a conclusion that to read any such work previously placed on the Index would still presently constitute a formal act of disobedience as if an Index of Forbidden Books was still in full operational existence and force. Similar reasoning could lead to the mistaken concept of a continued "moral binding force" for books previously prohibited by competent ecclesiastical authorities and later fully exonerated, imprimatured, and promulgated by the ecclesiastical authorities, as exemplified in the case of the prohibition of the *Diary, Divine Mercy in My Soul* by St. Faustina Kowalska by ecclesiastical authorities and which was later granted the *Imprimatur* and full Church approval. (5)

The former Cardinal Ratzinger has also been cited as personally condemning *The Poem*. Cardinal Ratzinger's 1985 comment to a fellow cardinal in a letter that speaks against the supernatural character of the literary forms of *The Poem* was not in a canonical or ecclesiastical form of an official and universally binding decree of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Nor did Cardinal Ratzinger he in any way prohibit the reading of *The Poem*.

It can be helpful to keep in mind that when the former Cardinal Ratzinger and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith did indeed examine a text which they concluded to contain intrinsic doctrinal error, that they did not hesitate to issue, when deemed appropriate, an officially promulgated "Notification" concerning a respective text due to its inherent doctrinal errors. (6) No such Notification has ever been issued by the postconciliar CDF regarding *The Poem of the Man-God*.

A number of other posed objections against *The Poem* appear lacking in serious theological foundation. One objection states that the lengthiness of the speeches of Jesus and Mary manifests evidence of a lack of authenticity. This opinion cannot substantiate a conclusion of doctrinal error, but rather comprises a very subjective and personal opinion as to the appropriate duration, or lack thereof, of the teachings of Jesus and the dialogues of Mary.

Moreover, the objection posed that *The Poem* makes reference to a sexual element in the Original Sin and therefore is doctrinally erroneous also cannot be theologically substantiated. The Church has always permitted a significant diversity regarding concepts of the nature of the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve, and both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas in fact held that the material element of Original Sin (*peccatum originale materialiter*) included to some degree the aspect of concupiscence. (7) Such

theological opinion certainly does not indicate a doctrinal error, regardless of a legitimate difference of opinion concerning the potential element of sexuality in relation to the first sin of Adam and Eve.

Yet a further objection of alleged doctrinal error is the reference found in *The Poem* that Mary is a "second-born of the Father" after Jesus, the Father's first born. Far from constituting doctrinal error, this mariological position was first posited by the Eastern Church author, John the Geometer in the tenth century, (8) and remains an acceptable mariological concept proximate to the Franciscan school of Mariology, as well as one complementary to the eternal predestination of Mary with Jesus in the Incarnation referred to by Blessed Pius IX in the papal statement defining the Immaculate Conception, *Ineffabilis Deus*. (9)

Moreover, the extensive mariology contained in *The Poem* was also the subject of a 400 page study written by arguably the greatest Italian mariologist of the twentieth century and Consultor to the Holy Office, Rev. Gabriel Roschini, O.S.M. (10) In a letter of January 17, 1974, Father Roschini received the congratulations of Pope Paul VI for his work entitled, *The Virgin Mary in the Writings of Maria Valtorta*, whereby the letter from the Secretary of State notes "the Holy Father thanks you wholeheartedly for this new testimony of your respectful regards and wishes you to receive from your labor the consolation of abundant spiritual benefits." (11) Neither the papal benediction granted by Pope Paul VI nor the papal congratulations issued through the Secretary of State would have been granted to a text based on a series of private revelations which were "forbidden" or declared "doctrinally erroneous" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

In sum, *The Poem of the Man-God* constitutes a text which licitly may be read and discerned by the contemporary faithful Catholic. I would invite interested Catholics to examine *The Poem* for themselves, while always retaining a determinate commitment of obedience to the final and definitive judgement of the Church regarding these reported private revelations. I personally have found these writings to be particularly inspiring in bringing to yet greater light and life the fathomless mysteries of the life of our Incarnate God as contained in the ineffable and infallible Word of God as contained in the New Testament.

Dr. Mark Miravalle
Professor, etc.

Note: The following documented evaluations may also be of assistance in an authentic and integral discernment and examination of The Poem of the Man-God:

His Excellency, Archbishop Alfonso Carinci, Secretary of the Congregation of the Sacred Rites (1946):

"There is nothing therein which is contrary to the Gospel. Rather, this work, a good complement to the Gospel, contributes towards a better understanding of its meaning." (12)

Fr. Dreyfus, of the French Biblical and Archeological School, Jerusalem (1986):

"I was greatly impressed on finding in Maria Valtorta's work the names of at least six or seven towns, which are absent from the Old and New Testaments. These names are known but to a few specialists, and through non-biblical sources.... Now, how could she have known these names, if not through the revelations she claims that she had?" (13)

Msgr. Ugo Lattanzi, dean of the Faculty of Theology of the Lateran Pontifical University, Adviser to the Holy Office (1951):

"The author could not have written such an abundant amount of material without being under the influence of a supernatural power." (14)

Fr. Marco Giraudo, O.P., Commissioner of the Holy Office in 1961, to Fr. Berti, representing the Order of the Servants of Mary (1961):

"You have our complete approval to continue the publication of this second edition of Maria Valtorta's Poem of the Man-God." (15)

Fr. Agostino Béa (future Cardinal), S.J., Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and Advisor to the Holy Office (1952):

"I have read in typed manuscripts many of the books written by Maria Valtorta... As far as exegesis is concerned, I did not find any errors in the parts which I examined." (16)

Fr. Gabriel M. Roschini, O.S.M., Professor at the "Marianum" Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Rome, author of 130 books, and Advisor to the Holy Office (1972):

"I must candidly admit that the Mariology found in Maria Valtorta's writings, whether published or not, has been for me a real discovery. No other Marian writing, not even the sum total of all the writings I have read and studied were able to give me as clear, as lively, as complete, as luminous, or as fascinating an image, both simple and sublime, of Mary, God's masterpiece." (17)

Dr. Vittorio Tredici, geologist and mineralogist, Italy (1952):

"I wish to underline the author's unexplainably precise knowledge of Palestine in its panoramic, topographic, geological and mineralogical aspects." (18) {mospagebreak}

His Excellency, Bishop George H. Pearce, S.M., Archbishop Emeritus of Suva, Fiji, (1987):

"I first came in contact with the work of Maria Valtorta in 1979... I find it tremendously inspiring. It is impossible for me to imagine that anyone could read this tremendous work with an open mind and not be convinced that its author can be no one but the Holy Spirit of God." (19)

Venerable Fr. Gabriel Allegra, O.F.M.

Father Gabriel Allegra, of the Order of Friars Minor, was a missionary and biblical exegete of world renown, having translated the entire Bible into Chinese. Fr. Allegra died at Hong Kong in 1976. Pope John Paul II declared Fr. Allegra "Venerable" on December 15, 1994. The following are excerpts from his extended defense of The Poem of the Man-God entitled A Critique of Maria Valtorta's "Poem of the Man-God." (20)

"The Visionary-Hearer usually begins by describing the location of the scene which she contemplates; she reports the chatter of the crowd and of the disciples; and then, according to what she sees and hears, she describes the miracles, relates the Discourses of the Lord, or the dialogues of those present with Him or with the disciples, or the dialogues among themselves. This re-evoking of the life of Jesus, its times and surroundings, and in its various aspects: physical, political, social, familial, is done without any effort. The Writer reports what she has seen or heard. Her style does not resound with the erudition notable in the most famous lives of Jesus. It is rather the report of an eye and auricular witness. If Mary of Magdala or Joanna of Chusa had been able during their life to see what Maria Valtorta sees, and had written it down, I believe that their testimony would not differ much from that of the *Poem*. Valtorta observed with such intensity the place and personages of her visions that anyone who has been in the Holy Land for studies, and has repeatedly read the Gospels, need make no excessive effort to reconstruct the scene....

I repeat: it is a world brought back to life, and the Writer rules it as if she possessed the genius of a Shakespeare or a Manzoni. But with the works of these two great men, how many studies, how many vigils, how many meditations are required! Maria Valtorta, on the contrary, even though possessing a brilliant intelligence, a tenacious and ready memory, did not even finish her secondary education; she was for years and years afflicted with various maladies and confined to her bed, had few books—all of which stood on two shelves of her bookcase—did not read any of the great commentaries on the Bible—which could have justified or explained her surprising scriptural culture—but just used the popular version of the Bible of Fr. Tintori, O.F.M. And yet she wrote the ten volumes of the Poem from 1943 to 1947, in four years!...

Striking Details

We all know how much research scholars have done, especially Hebrew scholars, in designing various maps of the political geography of Palestine from the time of the Maccabees up to the insurrection of Bar Kokba. For more than twenty years they have had to consult a pile of documents: The Talmud, Flavius Josephus, Inscriptions, Folklore, ancient itineraries.... And yet, the identification of a good many localities still remains

uncertain. In the Poem though—whatever could be the judgment given about its origin—there is no uncertainty. At least in 4/5ths of the cases, recent studies confirm the identifications supposed in (The Poem); and the number would grow, I think, if some specialist would be willing to study this question deeply. Valtorta, for example, sees the forking of roads, landmarks which indicate directions, various cultivations according to the differing quality of the terrain, so many Roman bridges thrown across various rivers or streams, springs that are lively in certain seasons and dried up in others. She notes the difference in pronunciation between the various inhabitants of diverse regions of Palestine, and a mass of other things which perplex the reader, or at least make him thoughtful.

There are a series of visions in which the mystery of the Birth of Jesus, His Agony, His Passion, and His Resurrection are described with Heavenly words and images, with an angelic eloquence; while on the other hand, so much light is thrown on the mystery of Judas, on the attempt to proclaim Jesus king, on His two brother-cousins who do not believe in Him, on the impression awakened in the Gentiles about Him, on His love of the lepers, the poor, the aged, children, the Samaritans, and especially on His love, so pleasingly ardent and delicate, for His Immaculate Mother.

And not only from the human point of view, but especially a theological one, who can remain indifferent reading the two chapters on the desolation of His most holy Mother after the tragedy of Calvary, which reveal to us how the Co-redemptrix had been tempted by Satan, and how Her Redeemer-Son had been tempted? The sublime theology of these two chapters may be compared to that of so many of the laments of the Sorrowful Mother.

Historical-Doctrinal Harmony

Exegetes today, even Catholics, take the strangest and most daring liberties over the historicity of the Gospel's Infancy accounts and the narratives of the Resurrection, as if with Form Criticism (*Formgeschichte*) and Redaction Criticism (*Redaktionsgeschichte Methode*) one finds the panacea for all difficulties—difficulties which were not unknown to the Fathers of the Church. Truly, to speak only of some recent exegetes: e.g., Fouard, Sepp, Fillion, Lagrange, Ricciotti..., on these difficult points they spoke their balanced and luminous words. But today there are other masters whom even our own follow with such confidence.... Well then, to come back to us: I invite the readers of the Poem to read the pages consecrated to the Resurrection, to the reconstruction of the events of the day of the Pasch, and they will ascertain how all is harmoniously bound together there—just as so many exegetes who follow the critical-historical-theological method have tried to do, but without fully succeeding. Such pages do not disturb, but gladden the heart of the faithful and strengthen their faith!"

Excerpts from a Letter of His Excellency, Bishop Roman Danylak,
Titular Bishop of Nyssa,
Rome, Italy (2002): (21)

The *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*, which the Catholic Church affixes to religious books, was and is a testimonial to the orthodoxy of doctrine of a given book. It need not necessarily convey the views or convictions of either the delegated priest/theologian censor who gives his nihil obstat, or of the bishop, who granted permission to print the

book. It is a guarantee that there is nothing against the Christian and Catholic faith or moral doctrine. This practice served the needs of the faithful well. There were, nonetheless, abuses in past history. We hear stories of Catholic ecclesiastics (bishops, priests and theologians) who would proscribe books, nay even order men and women who were accused of heresy, to be burned at the stake. We have the examples of Saint Joan of Arc and Savonarola, both of whom were burned at the stake on charges of heresy. Then there are the stories of the Spanish Inquisition. Two other saints, mystics and theologians, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Blessed (now Saint) Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, were hounded by their ecclesiastical superiors with accusations of heresy, hysteria. In the end the Church acknowledged them as saints. There are similar events in our times....

I wish to address the various issues involved with the life and writings of one of these, Maria Valtorta. She was born in Caserta, Italy in 1887 and died in Viareggio in 1961. She was bedridden from the late 1930's, following a mindless attack by a young hood that smashed her back with a crowbar. The Lord accepted her readiness to carry her cross in union with His passion. She became a victim soul. Jesus rewarded her generosity in suffering with boundless graces. She became his amanuensis. He dictated or unfolded to her the story of His life, death and resurrection, that of His mother and the early Church in a series of private revelations that began in 1943 and continued to 1954. With other holy souls it had suited His purpose to give external signs of the stigmata of His passion. He respected the self-effacing humility of Maria Valtorta, who asked that the signs of her passion remain invisible to the external world. In the last years of her life she totally withdrew into herself. Yet her literary productivity in the 12 years between 1943 and 1954 filled many volumes.

Maria, faithful to Christ and to His Church was in total obedience to the laws and rules of the Catholic Church. Nothing was to be printed without ecclesiastical approbation. Notwithstanding this insistence her spiritual director Fr. Migliorini and the first editor of her works Michele Pisani, began to divulge fragments of the writings. Three Servite Fathers had presented Pope Pius XII a typed copy of the first volume of the **Poem of the Man-God**. The pope said to them "Let it be published adding nothing to it nor taking away anything."

M. Pisani published the first volumes of Valtorta's Life of Christ, the Poem of the Man-God, without the approval of the local bishop. Zealous ecclesiastics brought this to the attention of their superiors. The **Poem of the Man-God** was placed on the index of forbidden books, not because of doctrinal errors, but because it was printed without the required nihil obstat and imprimatur.

The Poem of the Man-God, as it is titled in the current English translation, or the "**Gospel as it was revealed to me**," as it is known in subsequent Italian editions, is now in its fourth Italian edition. It has been translated into many other languages. Cardinal Ratzinger in private letters has acknowledged that this work is free from errors in doctrine or morals. The Conference of Italian Bishops has acknowledged the same in its correspondence with the current editor, Dr. Emilio Pisani.

Pope Paul VI abrogated the Institution of the Index of Forbidden Books in 1965/6. Prior approval of writings reporting new revelations is no longer required. The authors and publishers must submit their judgment concerning the alleged revelations to the ultimate judgment of the Church, without making claims of their truth. This ruling is retroactive to accounts even of earlier revelations if there is nothing contrary to faith and morals. Through a comedy of errors, some of these same ecclesiastics themselves now ignore the rule of canon law, and continue to condemn the writings of Maria Valtorta.

The big issue is this: "Is there anything against faith or morals in her writings?" All her critics begrudgingly have acknowledged that there is nothing against faith and morals...

The above is a somewhat lengthy introduction to my original intent: to present a letter of commendation, a *Nihil Obstat*, *Imprimatur* and a testimonial to this website of a Catholic monk on the writings of Maria Valtorta. Not only am I saying that there is nothing objectionable in *The Poem of the Man-God* and all the other writings of Valtorta in so far as faith and morals are concerned. I commend the painstaking scholarship of this monk that has brought together an array of the writings of a variety of theologians, like Fr. Karl Rahner on the significance of private revelation, of countless others who have given testimonies and writings of Maria Valtorta, the theological commentaries to her writings of one of her early spiritual directors, Fr. Corrado Berti; and the numerous other testimonies and studies on various aspects of Maria's writings. Biblical experts, geographers of the Holy Land, theologians, prelates and scientists, consistorial lawyers, who knew and visited Maria Valtorta in her lifetime. He adduces the testimony of the Venerable Fr. Gabriel Allegro, OFM, biblical exegete and missionary; and the painstaking scholarship of the present editor, and publisher of the works, Dr. Emilio Pisani, who has collated all the arguments, pro et contra, the writings of Maria Valtorta. This is a website worth visiting (www.mariavaltorta.com) many times both for those that have acquired the writings of Maria Valtorta, as well as for those who have not yet read this Life of Christ and the Blessed Mother...

Rome, Italy
February 13, 2002

+ Roman Danylak, Bishop

Notes

- (1) In later editions the title will reflect the original Italian title, *The Gospel as it was Revealed to Me*.
- (2) Cf. Fr. Mitch Pacwa, S.J., *Is "The Poem of the Man-God" Simply a Bad Novel?*, New Covenant, 1994; www.ewtn.com.
- (3) *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 27, 1948, p. 1.
- (4) *Letter of Father Agostino Béa*, 1952, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano, Viale Piscicelli, 89-91, 03036 Isola del Liri (FR), Italy.
- (5) The *Diary* was ecclesiastically prohibited in 1958 with the prohibition being removed April 15, 1978.
- (6) Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification Regarding Certain Writings of Fr. Marciano Vidal*, C.Ss.R., February 22, 2001.

- (7) *Summa Theologiae*, I-II 82, a.3.
- (8) Cf. Johannis Geometrae, *laus in Dormitione, B. M. Virginis*, Benger A.A., *La Assumptione de la t. s. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine*, du VI.e au X.e siècle. *Etudes et Documents* (Archives des l'Orient Chrétienne, 5, Paris, 1955, n. 407).
- (9) Cf. Bl. Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Dec. 8, 1854.
- (10) Cf. Fr. Gabriel Roschini, O.S.M., *The Virgin Mary in the Writings of Maria Valtorta*, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano SRL., 1973.
- (11) "Letter from Secretary of State to Father Gabriel Roschini," January 17, 1974, *The Virgin Mary in the Writings of Maria Valtorta*, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano, 1973.
- (12) *Letter of Archbishop Carinci*, 1946, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (13) *Letter of Father Dreyfus*, 1986, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (14) *Letter of Msgr. Ugo Lattanzi*, 1951, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (15) *Letter of Fr. Marco Girauda*, O.P., 1961, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (16) *Letter of Fr. Augustine Béa*, S.J., 1952, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (17) Cf. Fr. Gabriel Roschini, O.S.M., *The Virgin Mary in the Writings of Maria Valtorta*, English edition, Kolbe's Publications Inc., 1990, p. XVIII.
- (18) *Letter of Dr. Vittorio Tredici*, 1952, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (19) *Letter of Bishop George H. Pearce*, S.M., 1987, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (20) Ven. Fr. Gabriel Allegra, O.F.M., *A Critique of Maria Valtorta's "Poem of the Man-God"*, 1970, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.
- (21) *Letter of Bishop Roman Danylak*, Titular Bishop of Nyssa, Parrochia degli Ss. Sergio e Bacco, Piazza della Madonna dei Monti, 3, 00184, Rome, Italy, February 13, 2002, Centro Editoriale Valtortiano.