

Answering Radical Traditionalist Critiques of the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion



Saint John Paul II and St. Faustina were two of the greatest saints of the 20th century. But the ecclesiastical ideology of Fr. Perez and other radical traditionalists just blinds them from seeing the truth here, and finding joy and refreshment in what God gave to us through these saints of His merciful Heart.

By Dr. Robert Stackpole and Chris Sparks

There are so many misunderstandings and half-truths in the web article “Church Reasons to Condemn the Divine Mercy Devotion” that we hardly knew where to begin!

Although we trust that authors of articles like this one sincerely intend to be devoted to the good of the Church, they somehow get ahold of the proverbial “wrong end of the stick” as far as St. Faustina, Pope St. John Paul II, and the Divine Mercy message and devotion are concerned. Their eagerness to reject almost everything in the Church that came after Vatican II seems to blind them to the facts of the case.

Origin of These Criticisms

These criticisms are coming from what *Catholic Answers* calls the “radical traditionalist” wing of Catholicism. Father Brian Harrison, OS, has written, “The term ‘traditionalist’ has come to designate those Catholics who adopt a strongly ‘anti-modernist’ stance that is more or less critical even of many positions now approved and promulgated by the See of Peter, insofar as these reflect, or are at least related to, the changes introduced into Catholic life by Vatican Council II.”

“Radical traditionalism” would define those like the Society of St. Pius X, which breaks Canon Law in the name of fidelity to Tradition, and whose criticisms of the Divine Mercy message and devotion arise from a suspicion of many elements of magisterial teaching and Catholic practice emerging from Vatican II.

What They Assume

They assume that both Vatican II and the Magisterium after Vatican II lack teaching authority. They assume that the Second Vatican Council marked such a calamitous rupture with the perennial teaching of the Church that the Church is in a state of emergency, justifying their particular brand of traditionalist dissent and their refusal to abide by the Church's Canon Law. They see their disobedience to the Holy Father and the bishops in communion with him as necessitated by their fidelity to Scripture and Tradition.

In short, they see the three legged stool of the Church (standing on Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium) as having a broken leg – Magisterium. Unless and until the Holy See repudiates Vatican II, they seemingly will not accept the government of the Church, and will apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to anything that the bishops in communion with Rome have decided since Vatican II.

But that depends upon rejecting the very Tradition they claim to uphold!

... adherence to the Council is *essential* for any Catholic group. Nothing could be more antithetical to the true Catholic tradition than the SSPX denial of the legitimacy of a general council of the Catholic Church ratified by the bishop of Rome, the pope. – Kenneth D. Whitehead, "[Dissent of a Traditionalist Stripe](#)," *Catholic Answers Magazine*, 5/1/2012.

Radical traditionalists are essentially claiming that an ecumenical council convened by the Holy Father and including most of the world's bishops in communion with him – that is, in a context wherein Catholic Tradition would hold the Holy Spirit is most at work and safeguarding the teaching of the Church from error – so botched the proclamation of the Catholic faith as to plunge the Church into one of the gravest emergencies of her entire history, justifying the refusal of religious submission of mind and will to the teaching of that Council and subsequent popes, and evading the governing authority of the bishops in communion with Rome.

As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his [March 10, 2009 letter](#), "The Church's teaching authority cannot be frozen in the year 1962 – this must be quite clear to the Society."

The Church is indefectible. The successor to St. Peter is the rock on which the Church is founded. The documents of Vatican II generally are at least expressions of the Church's universal and ordinary magisterium, and therefore to be given "religious submission" by the minds and hearts of faithful Catholics, according to Ven. Pope Pius XII. "Religious submission" means that they are presumed to come under the general guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, alive and at work in the Church.

Responding Specifically to "Church Reasons to Condemn the Divine Mercy Devotion"

Father Patrick Perez acknowledges at the beginning of his article the debt he owes to the writings of Fr. Peter Scott, a priest of the schismatic Society of St. Pius X. We have previously answered Fr. Scott's criticisms of Divine Mercy in the web article "[How One Divine Mercy Critic Misses the Mark](#)."

Chief amongst Fr. Scott's criticisms is the claim that because the Holy See had banned the spread of the Divine Mercy message and devotion under the forms proposed by St. Faustina before Vatican II, therefore Catholics who accept the Holy See's post-conciliar lifting of the ban are being led astray. In that response, we explained that there were very good reasons why the Vatican reversed itself from its initial rejection of the supernatural authenticity of the revelations given to Sr. Faustina. The Vatican only made its original erroneous judgment because they had been operating on misinformation. And once they did have access to all the facts of the case, they were in a position to make a definitive and positive judgement.

As stated in that web article:

The fact is that the only translation the Vatican possessed of the *Diary of St. Faustina* in the 1950s was a faulty translation of the book into Italian, which included gross distortions of what Sister Faustina had

written (for example, our Lord said to Sister Faustina, "I am Love and Mercy itself" in entry 1074, but the Italian translation makes it appear that Faustina was making this claim about herself!). It was almost impossible for religious documents of any kind to be smuggled out of Poland to the Vatican in the 1950s because Poland was trapped behind the Iron Curtain, and Eastern Europe lay under the grip of Stalin. Thus, the Vatican placed a ban on the message and devotion largely because it was operating without the original documents, that is, on the basis of misinformation. Cardinal Wojtyla [from Poland] knew this, and when the opportunities arose later to get the correct information about Sister Faustina to the authorities in Rome, he and his confreres in the Polish episcopate did not hesitate to do so. Moreover, by 1978 the authorities in Rome also had on file the extraordinarily detailed theological analysis of Sister Faustina's *Diary* written in French by Fr. Ignacy Rozycki, one of Europe's leading Thomists and a member of the Pontifical Theological Commission. This weighty tome by Fr. Rozycki exonerated Sister Faustina of all suspicions of heterodoxy, and must have been another factor that led the CDF to lift the ban. In short ... there is no need ... to speculate as to why the Vatican banned the Divine Mercy devotion in 1958-1959. We know from the historical sources that they had very few – and largely inaccurate – sources to rely on in 1958, as the CDF itself implies in 1978 when the ban was lifted.

It should be noted here that Sr. Faustina actually prophesied that the Divine Mercy message and devotion that Christ was revealing to her would one day seem to be completely discredited, but ultimately it would be vindicated and become a source of countless blessings for the whole Church. For example, she wrote:

There will come a time when this work [of mercy], which God is demanding so very much, will be as though utterly undone. And then God will act with great power, which will give evidence of its authenticity. It will be a new splendor for the Church, although it has been dormant in it from long ago (*Diary*, 378).

Ironically, radical traditionalists accuse St. Faustina of being a false prophet and false visionary on the basis of the initial (and misinformed) reactions of the Church which St. Faustina herself supernaturally foresaw!

The author of the web article "Church Reasons to Condemn, etc.," Fr. Perez, writes:

So, Pius XII put the writings of Sr. Faustina on the *Index of Prohibited Books*. That meant that he considered that their content would lead Catholics astray or in the wrong direction. ...

But again, that was in the 1950s, when all the Vatican had was a faulty translation of Faustina's *Diary*.

And he writes:

Not once, but twice under Pope John XXIII, this particular devotion was condemned through the Holy Office. The first condemnation was in a plenary meeting held on November 19, 1958. The declaration from the Holy Office issued these three statements about this devotion

But again, all of these statements were issued in the 1950s, when the Vatican had only a faulty translation of Sr. Faustina's *Diary* to go on, and no one had yet done any thorough theological analysis of her *Diary*. Moreover, the author fails to inform his readers that the condemnations under John XXIII were not made in a definitive and final way, but only pending further investigation. Further, during Vatican II, the archbishop of Krakow, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, conferred with Cardinal Ottaviani, the head of the Holy Office, about starting Faustina's cause for canonization. Cardinal Ottaviani told Cardinal Wojtyla to proceed with the investigation while the witnesses were still alive. If the condemnations of Sr. Faustina's writings had been understood by the Holy Office to be irrevocable and everlasting, this would seem a strange piece of advice!

Saint Padre Pio

A similar situation arose with the Church's initial pastoral and disciplinary condemnations of St. Padre Pio. The Italian journalist Renzo Allegri, in his book *Padre Pio: Man of Hope*, reports that the Holy Office's first decree against Padre Pio of May 31, 1923, declared that they could not confirm that Padre Pio had the stigmata. A decree of July 24, 1924, from the Holy Office explained that the earlier decree said their earlier investigation "failed to find anything of a supernatural character" in the "phenomena surrounding Padre Pio of Pietrelcina," and forbade the faithful from maintaining contact with Padre Pio, even by letter. This condemnation was reiterated in a decree of July 11, 1926.

On May 23, 1931, Padre Pio was deprived of all ministerial functions, save for saying Mass privately, and lived as a recluse for three years. He was allowed to resume his priestly ministry by Pius XI, but the Holy Office never formally rescinded their decrees. (Indeed, Allegri says that at the time of Padre Pio's death [Sept. 23, 1968], "his name was still on the list of people condemned by the Holy Office.") In 1952, the Holy Office condemned a number of books on Padre Pio, books that later were used as source material for his cause for canonization. In 1960, at the conclusion of an apostolic visitation of the Capuchin friary at San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio was once again given a series of restrictions on his priestly ministry. These were only lifted on the direct intervention of St. John XXIII through Cardinal Ottaviani on January 30, 1964.

So the Church before the Council imposed heavy restrictions on Padre Pio, going so far as to decree officially that the Holy Office had found nothing supernatural in the phenomena surrounding him. On Feb. 20, 1971, Pope St. Paul VI spoke of Padre Pio having the stigmata in an address to the superiors of the Capuchins, contrary to the pre-conciliar decree of the Holy Office. Also subsequent to Vatican II, the Church, judging there to be no obstacles to Padre Pio's cause for canonization, beatified (May 2, 1999) and canonized him (June 16, 2002).

The Church after the Council did not hold as binding the decrees of the pre-conciliar Holy Office when it came to the supernatural phenomena in the life of St. Padre Pio. Similarly, the Church after the Council overturned the ban imposed on the Divine Mercy message and devotion given to us through St. Faustina. Further, the Church after the Council beatified and canonized both saints. If Faustina's post-conciliar rehabilitation and canonization is questionable, then so must be Padre Pio's.

Returning to the critiques of radical traditionalists, Fr. Perez especially objects to the Image of the Divine Mercy:

This symbolizes the error of the Divine Mercy devotion. It preaches that we can expect an unconditional mercy with no price to be paid whatsoever, with no obligations whatsoever. This is not the message of Christ. ...

And Fr. Perez also claims that this same erroneous theology was taught by Pope John Paul II.

Definition of "mercy"

First of all, the author does not seem to know the Catholic definition of the word "mercy" (Latin *miser cordia*). It does not refer solely to the forgiveness of sins. Rather, it refers to God's love when He reaches out to help His creatures to overcome every form of suffering and misery, and to meet every legitimate need. That is one reason why St. John Paul II did not focus on reparation for sin in his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*. As stated by Robert Stackpole, STD, in our web article, "How One Divine Mercy Critic Misses the Mark":

I am grieved that you are spreading misinformation about the Divine Mercy theology of Pope John Paul II. I trust you are only doing so because such misinformation was previously pandered to you. It is surely nonsense to claim that Pope John Paul II "pushed aside all consideration of the gravity of sin, and the need for penance, for satisfaction to Divine Justice, and hence of the Mass as an expiatory sacrifice, and likewise the need to gain indulgences and to do works of penance." I trust you will concede that all of these things you mention are taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [promulgated by Pope

John Paul II] (e.g. on the gravity of sin, entries 1854-1876; on the need for works of penance, entries 1430 and 1459-1460; on indulgences, entries 1471-1479; and on the Mass as an expiatory sacrifice, 1365-1372) Right at the heart of Pope John Paul II's theology of the Paschal Mystery, in the very encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* itself, we find his clear teaching that Jesus showed us His merciful love for us by making satisfaction to divine Justice for our sins on the Cross (section 7) Finally, here are the words that Pope John Paul II spoke while in Poland in 1999 on the feast of the Sacred Heart:

Let us make acts of reparation to the Divine Heart for the sins committed by us and by our fellow men. Let us make reparation for rejecting God's love and goodness. (p. 313)

The supposition that St. Faustina's own spirituality [also] contradicts the need for reparation for our sins to the Heart of Jesus can only be made by someone who has never actually read her *Diary*. As a matter of fact, her *Diary* is replete with her intention to offer reparation on behalf of sinners (for example, entries 1023, 485, 604, 323-324, and 607, among others). It is not surprising, therefore, that at several points in her *Diary*, St. Faustina summed up her mission on earth as *a total oblation of herself and all her sufferings for the good of souls lacking trust in God's mercy* (see *Diary*, entry 309). Near the end of her life, Faustina renewed her reparatory self-offering, in view of the terrible sufferings she was enduring because of her final illness. ... There are also passages in St. Faustina's *Diary* where she explicitly mentions the Heart of Jesus as the object of our reparation. This is especially true of each day of the "Novena to The Divine Mercy" that Jesus dictated to her, as recorded in *Diary* entries 1209-1229 and summed up in His instructions to her at the very beginning In fact, St. Faustina also wrote of Jesus' desire for her to bring consoling reparation to His Heart, especially during her times of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, in a way that breathes the very spirit of the writings of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (e.g. entries 1664, 310, 1058, and 367) Given all this ... how can you possibly tell people that St. Faustina's devotion to The Divine Mercy omits the need to make reparation to the Heart of Jesus on behalf of sinners, and especially for the sake of their conversion? It is true that this is not the main focus of her writing; she puts central emphasis not on our need to make reparation to Him, but on His prior merciful outreach to us:

Today the Lord said to me, I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with great trust. Sinners will attain justification, and the just will be confirmed in good. Whoever places his trust in My mercy will be filled with My divine peace at the hour of death (*Diary*, 1520). ...

Nevertheless, how could one argue that this different emphasis actually *excludes* the theology of the devotion to The Sacred Heart? Rather, it is an emphasis entirely *complementary* to that devotion! Moreover, it is also entirely appropriate to the "New Evangelization" needed today, in our historical circumstances, in which all people (including Catholics!) need to hear the basics of the Gospel proclaimed afresh – God's merciful love for us in Christ – before we are even ready to make loving reparation to His Heart in return [for our failure to return his love].

Father Perez also expends some effort picking on a few passages in her *Diary* that he believes are dubious:

Wait a minute, Our Lord united Himself more intimately with Sr. Faustina than with any other creature? Our Lady was the Immaculate Conception, but she was also His creature, she was created by Him as the rest of us were, albeit with the greatest exalted position free from original sin from the very beginning.

True enough, but Faustina evidently meant "more intimately than any other creature on earth at this time" not "than any other creature who has ever lived." Her spiritual director evidently took this to be her meaning, and unless compelled to do so by clear evidence, why would we interpret her words in any other way? Like any other Catholic, she is surely assumed innocent of heresy until proven otherwise!

Our Lord tells Sr. Faustina, “For your sake, I am going to bless the world.” Was World War II a blessing on the world? Since her native Poland did not go unscathed by the German invasion, it does not seem likely that He actually blessed the world. ...

The fact that in 1937 our Lord blessed the world at that time — perhaps with extra graces of conversion and sanctification — because of Sr. Faustina’s prayers does not mean that it would necessarily go on being blessed in that way for months and years to come, e.g. through the start of the War in 1939 and beyond. After all, she was only one saint, and we doubt any saint’s prayers — other than those of Our Lady — could have such an extended global efficacy. Further, St. Faustina explicitly predicted the coming of World War II, according to Fr. Michael Sopocko, her confessor (see Ewa Czackowska, *Faustina: The Mystic and Her Message* [Marian Press, 2014], pg. 340).

Father Perez continues:

Our Lord supposedly addressed Sr. Faustina on May 23, 1937, with these words: “Beloved pearl of My Heart.” What bothers me about this is that it is pure saccharin. Look how Our Lady speaks to Sr. Lucia or to St. Bernadette. It is not as “beloved pearl of My Heart.” It is impossible to imagine Our Lord stooping to saccharin language. Our Lord is Christ the King, Creator of the universe, and ruler of all that is. He does not say things like “beloved pearl of My Heart.”

Surely Fr. Perez has read the romantic poetry of the Song of Songs, and knows that many great saints have seen this poetry as a reflection of the soul’s spousal and mystical love-relationship with Christ. Indeed, many great saints of the Church have been addressed in such a tender and affective way by our Lord. Tender hyperbole is the language of true love! Just one example for now: St. Gertrude the Great. In the book *The Herald of Divine Love*, a sister in her convent (St. Mechtilde of Hackeborne, we believe) records that Jesus said of her:

I will always wear this jewell [on my breast] in honor of my spouse [St. Gertrude] ... You will not find me abiding anywhere in the world with greater love than in the sacrament of the altar, and consequently in the heart and soul of this my lover, on whom I have bestowed in a wonderful way all the delights of my divine heart. ...

There are many more passages like this in *The Herald of Divine Love*.

Father Perez complains:

Sr. Faustina claimed that Our Lord told her that she was exempt from judgment, every judgment — particular judgment and the general judgment. On February 4, 1935, she already claimed to hear this voice in her soul, “From today on, do not fear God’s judgment, for you will not be judged.” (*ibid.*, p. 168) ... Now, nobody but the Blessed Virgin, as far as I know, is free from the general and particular judgment. ...

Actually, any saint who dies in a state of entire sanctification and therefore goes straight to Heaven at their death is in that sense “exempt from divine judgement,” in the sense that they will not suffer condemnation of any kind. Saint Thomas Aquinas said:

Now those who build on the foundation of faith, “gold, silver, and precious stones” (1 Cor 3:12), by devoting themselves wholly to the Divine service, and who have no notable admixture of evil merit, are not subjected to a discussion of their merits ... wherefore they will be saved but will not be judged (ST Suppl. IIIae, 89, 6).

The Church teaches that one can only know for sure that one will be saved by means of an extraordinary revelation from God — which is evidently what St. Faustina experienced here.

And add to these examples the preposterous affirmation that the Host jumped out of the Tabernacle three times and placed itself in her hands, so that she had to open up the Tabernacle and place it back herself: “And the host came out of the Tabernacle and came to rest in my hands and I, with joy, placed it back in the Tabernacle. This was repeated a second time, and I did the same thing. Despite this, it happened a third time.” (ibid., p. 23) It makes it sound like a hamster that has gotten out of its cage. “Oh, no, here it is again. I have to go put this back now.” ... How many times has the Church declared that the hands of a priest are consecrated to handle the Sacred Species, and what kind of lesson would you be giving to the world by this example of the Host leaping into her hands so that she had to place it back in the Tabernacle herself?

First of all, it may be that what Sr. Faustina recorded here in *Diary* entry 44 was a visionary rather than an actual, physical event. After all, why would she as a sister of the second choir have access to the tabernacle key and the Hosts reserved in a chalice in that tabernacle? But even if she did have that access for some reason, it would not be the sin of sacrilege for her to return the consecrated Host to the tabernacle if Jesus in that consecrated Host was coming out of the tabernacle in the way she describes. The law of charity always takes precedence, even over the Church’s ritual norms — and in this story she was surely acting out of charity for the sisters in her convent. To be sure, it certainly is a strange story — about as strange as Our Lady asking St. Bernadette to dig in the soil at the grotto and eat dirt in front of everyone (hadn’t she misunderstood what Our Lady was asking of her?), or St. Francis stripping himself stark naked in front of everyone in the town square of Assisi, literally giving up all the earthly goods that his earthly father had given him, right down to his underwear, in order to free himself to give his life totally to Christ (wasn’t that the sin of lewdness?). God sometimes works in the lives of His saints in dramatic and hyperbolic ways in order to teach them and sanctify them. There is always a method to His madness for those who have eyes to see.

Making rash judgments

In short, Fr. Perez has really done little more than interpret some of these passages in her *Diary* in an uncharitable sense — it’s called making “rash judgements,” and it is the kind of thing that often happens when one is driven by a strong prejudice, in this case, a knee-jerk reaction against just about everything in the life of the Church that came after Vatican II, it seems. There have indeed been some grave problems in the Church as a result of the “spin” put on the Council documents by liberal bishops, priests, religious and theologians. We are still suffering grievously from all that, especially in clerical moral corruption and liturgical chaos. But it is just way off the mark to put St. John Paul II and St. Faustina in the general category of post-Vatican II liberal decay.

Saint John Paul II and St. Faustina were two of the greatest saints of the 20th century. But the ecclesiastical ideology of Fr. Perez and other radical traditionalists just blinds them from seeing the truth here, and finding joy and refreshment in what God gave to us through these saints of His merciful Heart. We pray that all radical traditionalists will come to appreciate that, and one day share in that joy.

Yours in our Savior,

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