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The Miraculous Medal - Rue du Bac, Paris 1830

Background

St Catherine Labouré, a novice, claimed that she had visions of the Virgin Mary in the chapel of the Daughters of Charity convent Rue du Bac in Paris. The Miraculous Medal was revealed to her during these visions. The Miraculous Medal is a major devotion in the Roman Catholic Church.

Catherine lost her mother at 9 and was devastated. At the time, she hugged a statue of Mary saying that Mary would be her mother from now on. This shows a deep psychological need to see Mary or to persuade herself that she had seen Mary. Unsurprisingly, she saw a middle-aged Virgin Mary, a woman of 40.

Catherine had been prone to visions. She saw the heart of St Vincent de Paul and claimed to have visions of Jesus Christ.

The Chapel

There is no evidence that the chapel was miraculously lit up that night or that Catherine even went to it. Did she dream the whole thing?

The chapel was locked for the night but Laboure found it miraculously unlocked. The nuns had no right to trespass into a locked Church. As the Church says that real apparitions from God never cause problems with legitimate human authority it is clear that this experience was not from God. As a nun she was not in a position to judge if her revelations were really from God. It is the qualified Church authorities that have to decide that. So her having apparitions in the chapel was a problem in itself. It is like inviting a babysitter who might be a paedophile to look after your child in that it shows disrespect. The Virgin can appear in a Church but that is not the point. As long as apparitions have an element of uncertain origin she would not.

Father Aladel

Catherine told her spiritual director about the vision and what Mary said. His name was Rev Father Jean Marie Aladel. He didn't believe her story. But the following week a violent atheistic revolution was sparked off and he believed her. He thought the prophecies had come true. He was misguided as the predictions of the Virgin are not very specific. Catherine's predictions were no better than those of fortune-tellers.

Aladel died in 1865. It was found that he if not Etienne had destroyed all the notes he kept on Catherine and her visions leaving only some unimportant ones. Coste's take on all that was, "Clearly, Monsieur Aladel never retracted what he wrote in the Notice, but could he have done so without scandal and without hurting the spread of the medal, an excellent devotion in itself, independently of the circumstances that could have instigated it?" The rational person will see that the notes had to be destroyed to cover up the truth about Laboure and her nonsensical apparitions.

The November apparition of 1830

While engaged in meditation with the sisters in the chapel at 5.30 pm on November 27, 1830, Catherine had a vision of Mary above the altar. Mary stood on an orb and had her hands by her side and rays shone down from rings on her fingers. Mary explained, "This orb which you see is the world, France in particular, and each person individually. I am praying for it and for everyone in the world. The rays which fall on this orb are the graces which I give to those who ask for them. But there are no rays from some of the stones. For many people fail to receive graces because they neglect to ask for them."

There is heresy in this apparition. "The rays which fall on this orb are the graces which I give to those who ask for them", contradicts the teaching that Mary does not give grace for it is only God does that.

Mary asked for a medal to be struck and promised that graces will abound for those who wear it with confidence. Mary showed her how the medal should look. The medal had to have the words, O Mary Conceived without Sin pray for us who have recourse to thee. Mary told her to ask Aladel to organise this. He did not take her seriously but changed his mind and two years later he had talked the Archbishop of Paris into having the medals struck. Two thousand were struck on June 20 1832.

Catherine - the inquiry

"During the official enquiries into the circumstances of the revelation of the Miraculous Medal Catherine herself was not summoned at all, a very unusual procedure, due to her persistent refusal to appear before the authorities. Moreover, she suffered from strange periods of amnesia, when she could not remember any details of what she had seen even questioned by her confessor" writes Hilda Graef in Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion.

The usual story is that nobody knew who had had the visions. Catherine got a feeling she was going to die in 1876 and she decided to go public with the information that she was the visionary. She kept a silence of 46 years. The motivation behind the hagiographers telling all this is to make it seem she was extremely humble.

The truth is that it was an open secret.

Catherine stated that she was disappointed that Rue Du Bac owing to size constraints could not be a place of pilgrimage. She went as far as to suggest that Mary had to appear at Lourdes because of this! That does not sound like a humble nun speaking. She knew this couldn't happen without her becoming a celebrity and possibly a saint to be.

The investigation organised by the Archbishop of Paris, Monsignor de Quelen, claimed it accepted the Marian visions story mainly because Catherine seemed to be a good honest person. This canonical inquiry took place in 1836. It was necessary under canon law prior to accepting an alleged revelation as true.

Problems with this inquiry exist. One main one is that the Archbishop put the cart before the horse. The main message of the visions was the Miraculous Medal. Yet he permitted and ordered the making of the medal in 1832 before the proper professional investigation. That shows the inquiry would show signs of being biased towards approving the visions. That makes it suspect.

An equally big problem is that Catherine Laboure refused to attend the commission. They didn't know who she was. Father Aladel had to speak for her. The investigation said the vision was probably authentic and based this conclusion on hearsay about her good character and on Father Aladel's honesty and goodness. In reality, it was their being impressed by Father Aladel that led to the recognition of the apparition.

That was not a canonical inquiry at all. It was a mockery and shows Catherine's lack of concern for evidence and truth. Aladel even went as far as to try and make an excuse for her on the basis "that now, this sister recalls almost no circumstance of the vision and that as a result every attempt to obtain information would be completely useless." Was she faking amnesia? Or was there really something wrong with her mentally?

Her absence was excused by the Commission which reported, " Her Director only looked upon the vision which she related to him as a play of her imagination, and he absolutely refused to believe in it. The Sister, though assured of its reality, and not daring to mention it again to her Director, nevertheless confided what occurred to no one else. A soul less strong or subject to the caprices of sensitiveness would not have refrained from carrying the question to other less inflexible judges."

The Spiritual Director's opposition was declared to have intimidated her from facing the judges of the Inquiry.

This is nonsense. The priest was not opposing her at that time. It was an excuse. There is no evidence.

1848 Apparition of the Cross

"A cross covered with a black veil appeared in the air, travelled over Paris, and caused terror. It was carried by men with angry faces, who suddenly stopped before the cathedral of Notre Dame, let the cross fall in the mud, and seized by fear fled as fast as they could. Then an outstretched arm appeared which, with a finger, pointed to blood, and a voice made itself heard, 'The blood flows, the innocent one dies, the pastor gives his life for his sheep.' Archbishop of Paris Denis-Auguste Affre, was murdered in June 1848 while acting to bring peace." All good except this account was written down nearly a month after the events. Catherine wrote it in a letter to her director. The vision is bizarre and shows why Catherine told Sister Jeanne Dufes who told her that if she said that Mary carried a globe in a vision it would make people think she was insane, "It would not be the first time that they have considered me mad".

The Medal is Wrong

Catherine objected to the medal that is now passed off as the Miraculous Medal. It shows Mary with hands extended out with rays of light emitting from rings she was wearing.

"On the 27th of November 1830, which was a Saturday, and the eve of the first Sunday of Advent, at half-past five in the evening whilst making my meditation in the chapel, I heard on the right side of the sanctuary, a noise like the rustling of a silk dress. All at once, I perceived Our Blessed Lady standing near the picture of Saint Joseph; she was of a middle size and her face indescribably beautiful. She was dressed in a gold coloured gown, very plain high necked, with flat sleeves. Her head was covered with a white veil which floated over her shoulders down to her feet. Her hair was parted, and confined in a sort of fillet trimmed with narrow lace. Her face was not concealed. Her feet rested on a globe, or rather one half of a globe, for this was all that could be seen. Her hands which were on a level with her waist, held in an easy manner another globe (a figure of the world). Her eyes were raised to heaven, and her countenance beamed with light while she offered the globe to Our Lord. Suddenly her fingers were covered with rings and beautiful precious stones. Rays of dazzling light darted out."

She later reinvented this story that Mary should have been depicted not with hands extended but by holding a globe that gives off light. This does not sound like much of a witness to the Virgin.

There is no evidence that she said she saw the serpent depicted on the medal. Yet the medal shows the Virgin trampling on the serpent. Also, she invented the notion that there should be twelve stars on the medal as an afterthought. She was imaginatively unreliable.

According to Coste, Sister Dufes wrote that Laboure had people digging to find treasure that she prophesied was there and that she claimed would be enough to build a church. Nothing was found.

"For Coste this fact alone was reason enough to believe that Catherine was unbalanced. This fact did not escape her fellow sisters. Coste quoted Chevalier as saying that he had sometimes heard "that her head was not on straight".

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Finally...

Catherine Labouré was declared a saint by Pope Pius XII in 1947.

Catherine is portrayed by Catholics as an uneducated woman who would have been unable to invent the Miraculous Medal. This ignores the fact that some of her pretended prophecies were quite clever.

Her body today is presented as evidence of the miracle of incorruptibility. She began to decay. She was injected with carbolic acid, glycerine and formaldehyde. Her hands rotted and were taken away and wax hands were put in their place. These hands stand erect and fool the faithful.

Today, Labouré still takes people for fools.

LABOURE'S STORY:
CRITICAL EVALUATION OF LABOURE'S CLAIMS: http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1222&context=vhj&sei-redir=1&referer=http://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=catherine laboure amnesia miraculous medal&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDcQFjAC&

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