

2. THE PARTICULAR INTRODUCTION TO THE PRESENT VOLUME

This work came into being over the course of several years, as new portraits were constantly added on occasion or at my own request. In the beginning, Adrienne was shown individual saints during times when she was not at all thinking of these particular people. For the most part, they were shown in their general disposition and, then, often in prayer that was particularly characteristic of them. Adrienne was each time able to reproduce their disposition when we recorded the dictation, and the words they spoke in prayer were given to her again during the dictation. Once the dictation was over, she would most often completely forget what she had seen and heard, as always was the case when Adrienne had “settled” something in obedience and put herself at the disposal of a new task. In the first period, she was also often given the vision of a saint during the night while she was at prayer, and she would report to me the next day that she had seen this or that saint, asking whether she could tell me about him or her. Frequently, she would be shown the essence of the person she saw without knowing exactly what the person’s name was. Once she said, “Today I have seen Gregory.” “Which one?” I asked. She confessed that she did not know there was more than one; she had no idea which person it was with whom she had interacted. I asked her then to begin, and after just a few sentences it became clear to me that it could have been none other than Gregory Nazianzen, as the section in this book will confirm. Later came Gregory the Great and Gregory of Nyssa to join him. Another time she said to me, “Today I received Catherine”, and to my question, “Which Catherine?” she could only say, “Not the one from Siena; I know her.” With the description, I guessed that it must have been Catherine of Genoa, whose life I myself had never read; a subsequent comparison with her biography and especially a comparison of the prayer with the account of the visions Adrienne had received gave me the certainty that it could have been no one else.

Later, the choice of the saints that were to be described was increasingly left to me. At first, I would jot down names for myself on a scrap of paper, and it might happen that, when I placed the paper before Adrienne, she would immediately say, “I can do this one.” Another name she might take with her into her nightly prayer and then describe

him to me on the following day. Later, I was able to request from her whatever saint or special personality I wished: a brief prayer would transpose her to the "place" of vision, she would close her eyes, look for a moment in the Spirit on what was shown her with intensity and inner excitement, and then the description would begin, slowly at first, in very clearly stamped words, and then more quickly, without the slightest hesitation, making new judgments with every sentence. Those who were still alive, and whose fate still lay in their free decision, were not shown, or (as, for example, with Therese Neumann) only in very brief glimpses. The definitive text on the little "Resl",¹³ as well as on John XXIII, were written only after their deaths.

Adrienne had either no knowledge or just a glimmer of an idea about the majority of the personalities whose names I presented to her. Quite often the outcome of her description took me completely by surprise; I had expected something altogether different. I also presented her with names that were for me nothing more than names; I got some of them from a list of people who had received the stigmata,¹⁴ above all, in order to see what sort of piety or attitude in each case lay behind the phenomenon; a few names were taken from the book by P. Herbert Thurston,¹⁵ behind whose purely psychological and physiological descriptions the properly religious and Christian destinies and decisions remained hopelessly hidden and unrecognizable. What might the truth be, one wants to ask, about a Maria Castreca or the enigmatic Maria de la Visitación? In most cases, I did not verify the answers with documents that may finally have come to my attention; but the things that were shown, which were always extremely precise and bore a unique personal quality, already arranged the individual and disconnected traits into an internally plausible portrait.

It is important for the reader to bear in mind that the only thing intended to be shown here is the particular person's prayer and attitude toward prayer in relation to God. This attitude can in some cases be considerably different from the person's other achievements in the world and also for the Church (as, for example, the surprising and indeed shocking portrait drawn of Thomas Aquinas shows). The degree of integration between inner life and external work can vary quite significantly in the different saints, as we see, for example, in the description of Gregory of Nyssa.

¹³["Resl" is a diminutive for "Theresa".—TRANS.]

¹⁴Franz L. Schleyer, *Die Stigmatisation mit den Blutmalen* (Hannover, 1948). Almost nothing about the interior life of those discussed comes to light in this doctor's descriptions.

¹⁵*Die körperlichen Begleiterscheinungen der Mystik* (Lucerne, 1956).

Particularly in the earlier periods of this work, Adrienne possessed an altogether extraordinary need for purity and transparency. Each time, she would ask, almost with anxiety, whether she was in fact “clean enough”, whether I was able to see perfectly through her soul. She preferred to go to confession every time before she undertook this work, desirous as she was to be in every case in a perfect state of confession. In this regard, she dictated to me the following sentences:

As long as a person lives in this world, he always clings in some sense to the things that belong to him. In confession, by contrast, a person must set the things that belong to him free; he must let the world go; he must bring forth everything and hand it over to the Church. He must become like a child. Then a person can allow everything God wishes to pass through him. Everything the Spirit says. But in confession a person gathers together all his sins, ‘as God sees them’. He becomes dispossessed of his own judgment over himself in order to leave judgment to God alone. Only when a person leaves judgment to God alone can he, when he is shown a saint, say how it is that the Holy Spirit sees him. The Holy Spirit’s judgment often turns out to be different from what the saint himself expects. For this reason, it can happen that something is shown of which the saint and those around him were scarcely aware; the Spirit underscores certain things that *he* takes to be important in the saint’s soul, whether they be positive or negative.

The state of confession, in which Adrienne sought to remain, means: pure openness and readiness, the whole of the soul being nothing more than a photographic plate, able to take up and reproduce anything that is given to it, just as it is given. If this purity were not there, according to Adrienne, it would not be possible to see “how much of what was given belonged to the saint himself and how much belonged to me. In fact, it would disproportionately increase precisely what I had kept of my own, hidden in myself, in the transmission of what came from the other, and would thus make the objectivity of the portrait impossible.” The more absolute the obedience demanded was (and here it was truly demanded in an absolute sense), the greater would be the guilt if someone wanted to keep something hidden. It is clear, however, that such an “experiment” could be performed only with a soul that had been completely purified. The complete self-effacement that was demanded has of course nothing in common with Buddhism and Zen; it is a pure work of Christian love; it is the highest possible approximation to the Church’s attitude as the Bride of Christ, in whose bosom and spirit all the saints and those who pray find their shelter. It is the attitude of the soul that has been known, since Origen’s time, as the *anima eccle-*

siastica, the ecclesial soul,¹⁶ it is the perfection of the Ignatian *sentire cum Ecclesia*.

Adrienne takes the prayers of the saints and other believers into her soul through a perfect reenactment of them. That is why she occasionally shows some awkwardness when she has to reproduce an imperfect prayer: she herself would have preferred to pray a different way. Or, if the prayer contains traces of vanity (as, for example, in Gregory Nazianzen), she feels afterward somewhat stained. On the other hand, she feels personally enriched by all the things in the prayers that are good. She receives all of this with her own “organ of prayer”. If she herself had not prayed so much, she would not have been able to transmit any prayers, and if she did not herself have some experience of everything that appears in all these prayers, she would also not have been able to reproduce them. Nevertheless, she was not permitted to be anything but an instrument in the moment of transmission. Moreover, she was not able to carry through these transmissions in the presence of anyone but her confessor, because the whole was a work of obedience.¹⁷

If, on Adrienne’s part, it is a work of obedience, then on the side of the saints it was a work of humility. Of a heavenly humility that does not shy from displaying itself before the earthly Church in an unshielded attitude of confession. If Péguy considers public confession to be an indispensable principle of the earthly Church,¹⁸ how much more validity it holds for the heavenly Church, where nothing private exists anymore! The examples will show that nothing happens outside of love and discretion, for the sake of mere curiosity, and that everything that is shown is an aid in some sense to Christianity on earth.

¹⁶ [Balthasar’s translation of the Latin as *verkirchlichte Seele* would be literally rendered into English as “ecclesialized soul”.—TRANS.]

¹⁷ The one attempt I made to request something of this sort in the presence of a third person (a young Jesuit priest, who was a friend of ours, was present) was such a torture to Adrienne that I immediately perceived the falseness of the endeavor and never repeated it.

¹⁸ “Publier le privé, c’est le principe même, c’est la méthode ecclésiastique même. Le vieux principe de la confession publique court sous toute la chrétienté. Le chrétien dans la paroisse, dans la chrétienté, est toujours le premier chrétien, le fidèle antique toujours prêt, toujours soumis à la confession publique, à la commune et comme mutuelle confession” (*Un Nouveau Théologien, Oeuvres en prose*, vol. 2 [Pléiade], 875). [To make public what is private is the very principle, the very method of the Church. The old principle of public confession flows under the whole of Christianity. The Christian in the parish, in Christianity, is always the first Christian, always the ancient believer, who is always ready, always subject to public confession, to a common and, as it were, mutual confession.]

The various series came to be at different times. In the first series, one finds sections included that occurred at a later date. The series dealing with the threefold attitude and the series with the recited prayers came into existence within the space of a relatively brief period of time. When Adrienne had finished her description, I was given the freedom to ask questions in order to fill in some blanks. These questions, or the answers to them, can be recognized in the text because they are preceded by a line space. It is significant that Adrienne, who was doubtless in a form of ecstasy, nevertheless heard the voice of her confessor by virtue of her obedience, understood his questions, and was able to answer them in view of what she saw.

The choice of the saints' portraits remains of course arbitrary; there could have been many more such portraits to be had. Regarding the wording of the dictation, very little has been changed; nothing at all has been changed in terms of the meaning, though the sentence structure was here and there tightened; French words (Adrienne's native language was French, and she was not always able to find immediately the fitting word in German) were often left untranslated. A bit more variety was brought to her somewhat poor vocabulary through the occasional use of synonyms.

In judging these portraits, the reader ought to focus his attention on the center of the things said rather than getting caught up in the margins or in trivial matters. Certain details might be expressed in a one-sided manner, perhaps even badly characterized. But no one is going to deny that Michelangelo is able to draw well just because in one of his drawings there happens to be a "stray" line. In reading, one reads the Spirit in the illuminated background, not in the letter. No one who reads the following pages can fail to see the power of the things said, whose intellectual differentiation and characterization presuppose a wholly uncommon natural intelligence and a just as uncommon supernatural discernment of spirits. It should be clear, however, that this work is given to the modern, prayer-weary Church in order to awaken in her an astonishment over the riches of the "world of prayer" and a new joy in praying.

The second part of the *Book of All Saints* will fill out things in this first volume in a variety of ways.

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