

**Editor’s Note:** In this article, originally published in the August 2013 issue of *CFN*, John Vennari (R.I.P.) contrasts “the stringent juridical method” of the centuries-old canonization process with the “academic approach” of the new system introduced by Pope John Paul II. As the crisis in the Church worsens, and the post-conciliar “saint-making machine” is ramped up even further, John’s research and insights are more timely than ever.

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Speaking of the rigorous pre-Vatican II procedure for beatifications, eminent Catholic historian William Thomas Walsh, who died in 1949, wrote the following: “*No secular court trying a man for his life is more thorough and scrupulous than the Congregation of Rites in seeking to establish whether or not the servant of God practiced virtues both theological and cardinal, and to a heroic degree.* If that is established, the advocate of the cause must next prove that his presence in Heaven has been indicated by at least two miracles, while a cardinal who is an expert theologian does all he can to discredit the evidence—hence his popular title of *advocatus diaboli*, or Devil’s Advocate. If the evidence survives every attempt to destroy it after months, years and sometimes centuries of discussion, he is then beatified, that is, he is declared to be blessed.”

We will later note the new 1983 process of canonization dispenses with the Devil’s Advocate and eliminates the stringent juridical method in favor of an academic approach. The discarding of the “thorough and scrupulous” procedure praised by Mr. Walsh cannot help but introduce doubt to the integrity of the entire new process—especially in the case of “fast-track” canonizations.

Mr. Walsh further noted the following about the traditional process: “The final stage of canonization, the last of twenty distinct steps, may take even more years or centuries. It must be proved beyond any reasonable doubt that two additional miracles have been performed through the instance of the servant of God, since the beatification. When and if this is done, the Pope issues a bull (a sealed letter) of canonization.”

## Sound Orthodoxy

Walsh also stressed the demand for sound orthodoxy regarding anyone considered for canonization: “Theologians carefully scrutinize all the available writings—books, letters and so on—of the servant of God whose claim to holiness is being urged, together with all the depositions obtainable from those who spoke with him and knew him well. If nothing contrary to faith or morals is found, a decree is published authorizing further investigation.”[\[1\]](#)

If we begin with the criteria that “nothing contrary to faith or morals” can be found in any legitimate claim to beatification, we read with concern an invocation uttered by one who is now slated for “canonization” [and who was, indeed, “canonized” in 2014]: “Hear our prayers for the intention of the Jewish people, which You continue to cherish according to the Patriarchs....Be mindful of the new generation, the young and the children: may they persevere in fidelity to You, in what is the exceptional mystery of their vocation.”[\[2\]](#)

Note: the man who offers this prayer does not indicate that Jews should convert to Our Lord’s one true Church for salvation but prays they “persevere in fidelity” to a counterfeit religious system that formally rejects Jesus Christ.

Commenting on *The Book of the Dead* at Auschwitz, the same man says: “Persons whose names are contained in these books were incarcerated, they underwent tortures and were finally deprived of life solely, in most cases, because they belonged to a certain nation rather than another....In the light of faith, we see the witness of heroic fidelity, which united them to God in eternity, and a seed of peace for future generations.”[\[3\]](#)

While we grieve for anyone who undergoes persecution and torture, our speaker indicates that the Jewish people who suffered at Auschwitz suffered a kind of Jewish martyrdom “which united them to God in eternity,” a concept unheard of in Church history.

In days of doctrinal sanity, these radical statements—and there are countless more such utterances from the same man—would have stopped any process of beatification in its tracks and disqualified the candidate permanently.

The Catholic who made these questionable remarks was Pope John Paul II, whom Pope Francis has just approved for “canonization.”[\[iv\]](#) In our post-Conciliar period of ecclesiastical sentimentality, the age-old truths of the Faith no longer stand as the central criteria for determining heroic virtue. As Fr. Patrick de La Rocque notes, “Far from practicing the theological virtue of Faith to a heroic degree, the late pope [John Paul II] departed from it dangerously in a number of his teachings.”[\[5\]](#)

Nor do we see with John Paul II the virtue of true Charity, since John Paul throughout his entire pontificate refused to remind non-Catholics—Jews included—that they must convert to Christ’s one true Church for salvation.

While presenting an entire chapter full of such quotes from the Polish pope,[\[6\]](#) Fr. La Rocque notes: “By systematically concealing the [objective] sin of disbelief that is involved in formal adherence to Judaism, so as to praise instead the [alleged] fidelity to God of present-day Judaism...Pope John Paul II was seriously lacking in that delicate but important

pastoral charity that consists in denouncing sin so as to allow the conversion of the sinner.”[\[7\]](#)

Yet Fr. La Rocque, or anyone else, who advances reasoned objections to John Paul II’s orthodoxy and objections to the claim that John Paul practiced heroic virtue, is simply ignored. The challenges are neither acknowledged nor answered. “We in the Vatican have decided that John Paul II is a saint, and that is that!” This type of thinking is due primarily to the laxer system of canonization introduced in 1983, as well as to the “new understanding” of what it means to be Catholic that was spawned by the Second Vatican Council, and by its most zealous evangelist, Pope John Paul II.

## The New Process

On January 25, 1983, Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, the long-awaited revision of the beatification and canonization process. Cardinal Suenens, Paul VI, and other progressivists since the Council had encouraged such an update. John Paul brought it to fruition.[\[8\]](#)

The change was part of the alleged goal to make the canonization process “simpler, faster, cheaper, more ‘collegial’ and ultimately more productive.”[\[9\]](#)

In the new system, the Devil’s Advocate has been eliminated. The “Promoter of the Faith,” as the Devil’s Advocate has been called, is given the new title “Prelate Theologian.” His main task is to choose the theological consultants and preside at the meetings.

Catholic journalist Kenneth L. Woodward spotlights the root difference between the old and new systems: “At the core of the reform is a striking paradigm shift: no longer would the Church look to the courtroom as its model for arriving at the truth of a saint’s life; instead, it would employ the academic model of researching and writing a doctoral dissertation.”

Woodward continues, “In effect, then, the relator had replaced both the Devil’s Advocate and the defense lawyer. He alone was responsible for establishing martyrdom or heroic virtue, and it was up to the theological and historical consultants to give his work a passing or failing grade.”[\[10\]](#)

Though there may have been some abuses by the lawyers over the centuries, the elimination of lawyers radically transforms the procedure that had been at the heart of the saint-making process for half a millennium: a system deemed necessary by the great master of ascetical and mystical theology, Pope Benedict XIV (1740-58) in his monumental work, *The Beatification and Canonization of Saints*.[\[11\]](#)

Though many in the post-Conciliar Vatican welcomed John Paul II’s new method, not all were thrilled. Msgr. Luigi Porsi, a 20-year veteran of the Church’s legal system, decried the elimination of the Devil’s Advocate and the accompanying lawyers as part of the beatification process. In an unanswered letter to Pope John Paul II, Porsi complained the reform went too far: “There is no longer any room for an adversarial function.”[\[12\]](#)

Thus, a central question arises: if there is a radical change in what was the rigorous procedure for making saints, how can we expect the same secure results?

Indeed, the “fast-track” beatifications of the past few decades already introduce doubt to the integrity of the process. The two cases that first come to mind are that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Opus Dei Founder Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer.

## **Mother Teresa: Doctors Insist, No Miracle**

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a popular figure recognized as a “saint” while she was still alive, even though, despite her many good works, she seemed to embrace a theology of indifferentism. She is on record saying, “I’ve always said we should help a Hindu become a better Hindu, a Muslim become a better Muslim, a Catholic become a better Catholic.”[\[13\]](#)

In 1976, Mother Teresa organized a 25th anniversary celebration of the Missionaries of Charity. As part of the celebration, she obtained permission from the Archbishop of Calcutta for her and her sisters to pray in some pagan temples—non-Christian houses of worship—each day of the jubilee. “Her desire was for each group to hold its own worship service of thanksgiving. Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants and so forth joined her and her sisters to thank the one true God in their own way. She and her sister prayed at eighteen different worship sites,” including Hindu temples.[\[14\]](#)

The central “miracle” employed to justify Mother Teresa’s 2003 “beatification” was the alleged cure of Monica Besra in September 1998. Besra, from Dangram, 460 miles northeast of Calcutta, claimed to have been cured of a tumor after praying to Mother Teresa while pressing a medallion of Mother Teresa’s image to her side.

Despite this claim, Besra’s doctors insist the cure had nothing miraculous about it, but was the result of strong anti-TB drugs administered over a period of nine months.

“This miraculous claim is absolute nonsense and should be condemned by everyone,” said Dr. R. K. Musafi. “She had a medium-sized tumor in her lower abdomen caused by tuberculosis. The drugs she was given eventually reduced the cystic mass and it

disappeared after a year’s treatment.”

Likewise, Dr. T. K. Biswas, the first doctor to treat Besra, said, “With all due respect to Mother Teresa, there should not be any talk of a miracle by her. We advised her a prolonged anti-tubercular treatment and she was cured.”

Remember, the Catholic Church has always demanded that a miraculous cure requires rigorous proof beyond any reasonable doubt. The integrity of the Mother Teresa “miracle” is thus seriously compromised.

Dr. Manju Murshet, Superintendent of the Balurghat Hospital, complained that the doctors were under pressure from Church members to declare a miraculous cure: “They want us to say Monica Besra’s recovery was a miracle and beyond the comprehension of medical science.”[\[15\]](#)

Besra’s husband Deiku also challenges the claim of a miraculous cure. “It is much ado about nothing,” he said, “My wife was cured by the doctors, not by any miracle.”[\[16\]](#)

Further, Besra’s medical records have disappeared from the hospital. The records containing her physician’s notes, prescriptions, and sonograms were taken by Sister Betta of the Missionaries of Charity. When *Time* magazine contacted Sister Betta to ask about Besra’s medical records, the only response was “no comment.”[\[17\]](#)

Besra herself now claims she has been abandoned by the Missionary sisters who flocked to her home at the time of the alleged miracle and promised support. “My hut was frequented by nuns of the Missionaries of Charity before the beatification of Mother Teresa,” said Mrs. Besra, squatting on the floor of her thatched and mud house. “They made a lot of promises to me and assured me of financial help for my livelihood and my children’s education. After that, they forgot me. I am living in penury. My husband is sick. My children have stopped going to school as I have no money. I have to work in the fields to feed my husband and five children.”[\[18\]](#)

It is not our intention to pass a judgment on these events. We merely wish to observe the following: it is hard to imagine this flurry of questions and abuses occurring under the former rigorous system of canonization. With the Devil’s Advocate now eliminated, abuse and suspicion sully not only Mother Teresa’s case, but the entire new beatification process itself.

Once again, regarding the integrity of the new process, we encounter doubt.

## Monsignor Escriva

Msgr. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, the founder of the controversial Opus Dei organization who died in 1975, was also placed on the fast track. Fr. Peter Scott, the then rector of SSPX's Holy Cross Seminary in Australia, wrote in November 2002 of what he called Escriva's “shameful” and “highly questionable canonization.”

Noting that due process was not followed, Father Scott objected that the procedure contained no Devil's Advocate, and that “former members of Opus Dei who personally knew Msgr. Escriva and who attempted to register their objections, were not allowed to express their opinion.”

In a last-ditch effort to provide more objective thinking regarding the hasty canonization, a group of former Opus Dei members wrote an Open Letter to Pope John Paul II in which they said: “It is because we believe that the truth has been in large part hidden that we now give our testimony in order to avoid a danger for the Faith brought about by the unjustifiable reverence for the man that you have the intention of canonizing soon.”

They went on to explain that the authors of this Open Letter include “people who have intimately known Msgr. Escriva and who can testify to his arrogance, to his evil character, to his improper seeking of a title (Marquise of Peralta), to his dishonesty, to his indifference towards the poor, to his love of luxury and ostentation, to his lack of compassion, and to his idolatrous devotion towards ‘Opus Dei.’”[\[19\]](#)

After having pointed out that the process was uncanonical and dishonest, they had this to say: “It [the canonization] will offend God. It will stain the Church forever. It will take away from the saints their special holiness. It will call into question the credibility of all the canonizations made during your Papacy. It will undermine the future authority of the Papacy.”

Father Scott notes that those who wrote the Open Letter were not traditionalists; they were former members of Escriva's organization, “but their supplication was not heard, and the ceremony took place as arranged on October 6, 2002.

“Their letter will certainly turn out to be prophetic, for in time they will be proven to be right in their assessment concerning Escriva as well as concerning Opus Dei that they so aptly compare to the liberal Sillon movement, rightly condemned by St. Pius X in 1910. This kind of last-minute objection is unheard of in the history of the Church. How could Catholics possibly regard such a man as heroic in virtue, as an extraordinary model of Catholic spirituality, as a saint must be? For all the reasons that they give, we cannot possibly

consider this ‘canonization’ as a valid, infallible papal pronouncement.”[\[20\]](#)

In a similar vein, Catholic author Kenneth Woodward expressed grave reservations about the procedure regarding Escriva’s rapid “beatification.”

When Fr. Richard John Neuhaus criticized this negative assessment, claiming the liberal-leaning Woodward was always unfavorable to Opus Dei, Woodward responded, “My writing about Opus Dei has focused almost entirely on the beatification of its founder, not the organization itself. On this point, the only fair-minded conclusion I can reach, given the evidence of the *positio* itself and interviews with people in Rome involved in the process, is that Opus Dei subverted the canonization process to get its man beatified. In a word, it was a scandal—from the conduct of the tribunals through the writing of the *positio* to the high-handed treatment of the experts picked to judge the cause. That *Newsweek* caught Opus Dei officials making claims that were not true is a matter of record. Escriva may have been a saint—who am I to judge? But you could never tell from the way his cause was handled.”[\[21\]](#)

Once again, regarding the integrity of the process, we encounter doubt and more doubt.

## Assisi: Catholic Youngsters Can’t Believe It

It seems clear that the real purpose of the upcoming “canonizations” of John XXIII and John Paul II [NB: Once again, they took place in 2014] is to “canonize” Vatican II and its entire liberal orientation of religious liberty, ecumenism, and pan-religious activity.

For now, we will content ourselves with another objection to John Paul’s canonization.

At the time of the 2011 “beatification” of John Paul II, I learned of a homeschool online discussion taking place among sixth to ninth graders. A traditional Catholic youth (whom I know) was telling non-traditionalist Catholic acquaintances about Pope John Paul II’s pan-religious meeting at Assisi; that John Paul invited Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Jains, and pagans to pray together at the event in October 1986. He also posted photos of the Assisi gathering.

The homeschooled youngsters refused to believe it. They claimed it could not be true; that the John Paul II/Assisi photos were doctored, that no pope—especially one “beatified” by the allegedly conservative Benedict XVI—would perform this act of ecclesiastical treason.

The young traditional Catholic who told his acquaintances about Assisi was accused of making up the account; of trying to defame the name of “Blessed” Pope John Paul II; of inventing a malicious story about a pagan-packed, pan-religious prayer-fest that no pope would countenance.



Here, then, is the striking point: The children knew the Assisi prayer meeting was not Catholic. The children knew it was not a manifestation of heroic virtue. The children knew it was a scandal of colossal dimension, and thus refused to believe John Paul could be guilty of it. To their credit, these youngsters displayed a better *sensus Catholicus* than today’s Vatican leaders.

If Catholic homeschool children, age 13 and under, recognize the outrage of the pan-religious meeting at Assisi, why did not Pope Benedict XVI, who placed Papa Wojtyla on the fast-track to beatification? Why does not Pope Francis, who on July 5 [NB: 2013] approved John Paul II’s “canonization”? Under today’s streamlined procedure, these crucial questions are ignored as irrelevant.

Once again regarding the integrity of the process, we encounter doubt, doubt and more doubt.

## Defect in Procedure

There is an apparent quick-fix solution to the modern canonization dilemma: it is to declare that today’s popes are not popes at all; that they have lost their office due to heresy, and that we have not had a true pope since Pius XII. Yet this Sedevacantist reaction, I believe, merely substitutes one collection of thorny questions with others of greater magnitude. A thorough response to the details of our unprecedented situation calls for the genius of a Bellarmine or a Garrigou-Lagrange—genius seemingly lacking in our post-Conciliar period.[\[22\]](#)

To conclude: Fast-track beatifications, where the will to beatify supersedes the worthiness of the proposed candidate, are a dangerous and questionable development. This is what we see with the determined push to rapidly canonize John XXIII and John Paul II. Under the new system that eliminates the Devil’s Advocate, legitimate challenges to the sanctity, orthodoxy, and miraculous intervention of the candidate are left unaddressed. As Vatican postulator Msgr. Luigi Porsi warned, “There is no longer any room for an adversarial function.”

Everything in the Catholic Faith conforms to reason.[\[23\]](#) It seems unreasonable, then, to assume that a drastic loosening in the procedure for canonization would yield the same secure results as the “thorough and scrupulous” method that had been in place for centuries.[\[24\]](#)

Thus, I believe modern beatifications and canonizations are at best doubtful due to defect in procedure, and due to a new criteria for holiness engendered by the new “ecumenical



Catholicism” of Vatican II.

## Notes

[1] William Thomas Walsh, *The Saints in Action* (New York: Hanover, 1961), p. 14 (emphasis added). Though Walsh died in 1949, *The Saints in Action* was not published until 1961.

[2] Fr. Patrick de La Rocque, FSSPX, *Pope John Paul II: Doubts about a Beatification* (Kansas City: Angelus Press, 2011), p. 99.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[4] “Pope Francis Signs Canonization Decrees for John XXIII and John Paul II,” *Vatican Radio*, July 5, 2013. Pope Francis “waived” the second necessary miracle for the “canonization” of John XXIII.

[5] La Rocque, *Doubts about a Beatification*, p. xviii.

[6] See Chapter III (pp. 89-113), “John Paul II and the Virtue of Charity,” *Pope John Paul II: Doubts about a Beatification*.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[8] Some background: In the year 1234, Pope Gregory IX established procedures to investigate the life of a candidate saint and any attributed miracles. In 1588, Pope Sixtus V entrusted the Congregation of Rites (later named the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints) to oversee the entire process. Beginning with Pope Urban VIII in 1634, various Popes have revised and improved the norms and procedures for canonization. Prospero Lambertini, a brilliant canonist who had come from the ranks of the Congregation of Rites to become Pope Benedict XIV, set himself the task of reviewing and clarifying the Church’s practice of making saints. His long and masterful work in five volumes, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (On the Beatification of the Servants of God and the Canonization of the Blessed), published between 1734 and 1738, is the touchstone text for the making of saints.

[9] Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 91.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] See “[Advocatus Diaboli](#)” (Devil’s Advocate), *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, Robert

Appleton Company, 1907.

[12] Woodward, *Making Saints*, p. 95.

[13] Mark Zima, *Mother Teresa: The Case for the Cause (Is Mother Teresa of Calcutta a Saint?)* (Nashville: Cold Tree Press, 2007), p. 29.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[15] Quotes from Doctors Musafi, Biswas, and Murshet are taken from Zima’s *Mother Teresa: The Case for the Cause*, pp. 190-191.

[16] “Mother Teresa ‘miracle’ patient accuses nuns,” *Telegraph*, Sept. 5, 2007.

[17] “What’s Mother Teresa Got to Do with It?” *Time.com*, Oct. 14, 2002.

[18] “Mother Teresa ‘miracle’ patient accuses nuns.” It should be noted that Besra still believes she was miraculously cured by Mother Teresa. Her doctors, however, testify that there was nothing miraculous about it.

[19] These complaints about Escriva surface elsewhere, including the book by a former Opus Dei member, *Beyond the Threshold—A Life in Opus Dei: The True, Unfinished Story* (Maria del Carmen Tapia, 1998); and were also mentioned by Fr. Gregory Hesse in speeches at our CFN conference, 1998.

[20] Holy Cross Seminary Newsletter, Nov. 1, 2002.

[21] “Fair to Opus Dei?” Letter to the Editor of *First Things*, No. 61, March 1996, pp. 2-7. [Note: Woodward’s response was written after Escriva’s “beatification” but prior to his “canonization”]. Posted on Opus Dei Awareness Network webpage, updated June 20, 2005.

[22] For example, it is argued that any “infallibility” that deals with canonization would not extend beyond the fact that the soul of the saint is in Heaven. Period. Yet the way in which the Church would judge that the soul is in Heaven is by means of authentic miracles attributed to the “saint’s” intercession. This is why the old system for determining this was, as William Thomas Walsh noted, “thorough and scrupulous.” Yet if the stringent procedure for determining a miracle is not followed—such as what appears to be the case with the “miracle” attributed to Mother Teresa of Calcutta—how is the “saint’s” presence in Heaven determined beyond the pronouncement of a post-Conciliar pope and his will to canonize a given individual?

[23] Though the mysteries, such as the Blessed Trinity and Transubstantiation, are said to be above reason, but not contrary to it.

[24] Fr. Joseph de Sainte Marie was a capable Carmelite theologian who worked in Rome in the 1970s and '80s. An expert on Fatima and a loyal son of Pope John Paul II, he helped compose the formula for the Pope's 1982 Consecration of the World to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Despite this, Father de Saint Marie issued the following warning about the unfortunate present state of the Church and those at its highest levels: “In our time, and it is one of the most obvious signs of the extraordinarily abnormal character of the current state of the Church, it is very often the case that the acts of the Holy See demand of us prudence and discernment.” (Cited from *Apropos*, Isle of Sky, No. 16, 1994, p. 5.) Fr. Joseph de Saint Marie thus tells in a respectful and gentlemanly manner, that our Holy Church now passes through an extraordinary period of history. He uses the word “abnormal.” Yet in the face of this “extraordinarily abnormal character of the current state of the Church,” he does not advise us to follow the Pope blindly. Aligning himself, rather, with the traditional teaching of Popes and Saints (for example, that of Pope Innocent III, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Francis de Sales, John of St. Thomas and others) Father de Saint Marie cautions us that “in our time,” we have to be careful. We have to exercise “prudence and discernment” when it comes to the actions of the Holy See itself; that is, even when it comes to papal actions. Further, he tells us it is “very often the case” that we have to now exercise this caution.