

the older thesis were quite obsolete and abandoned, would be precipitate and unwise. The conservative teaching is still very much alive, and is being ably represented and defended by such other European authorities as Fr. A. Messineo, S.J., sociological expert on the staff of the Roman Jesuit organ, *La Civiltà Cattolica* and by Fr. E. Guerrero, S.J., editor of the Spanish Jesuit publication, *Hatton y Fe*.<sup>39</sup> While the mention of these Spanish and Italian writers on Church and state may strike a neuralgic nerve somewhere in the new school, we refer to them in the belief that there are others who can read Latins without tears.

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<sup>38</sup> Of his several articles in the course of 1950 and the first half of 1951, we mention but two: "Democrazia e liberta religiosa," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Cil, Vol. II (April 21, 1951), 126-37; "Democrazia e laicismo dello Stato." *La Civiltà Cattolica*, CH, Vol. II (June 16, 1951), 585-96.

<sup>39</sup> Again we mention but two of many articles: "Las Conversaciones Catholicas de San Sebastian," *Rasón y Fe*, December, 1949, pp. 398-418 (see especially pp. 412-16); "El Estado laico cotno ideal cristiano," *Rascon y Fe*, November, 1950. pp. 341-54.

#### THE PREACHING OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Let priests, therefore, who are bound by their office to procure the eternal salvation of the faithful, after they have themselves by diligent study perused the sacred pages and made them their own by prayer and meditations, assiduously distribute the heavenly treasures of the divine word by sermons, homilies and exhortations; let them confirm the Christian doctrine by sentences from the Sacred Books and illustrate it by outstanding examples from sacred history and in particular from the Gospel of Christ Our Lord: and—avoiding with the greatest care those purely arbitrary and far-fetched adaptations, which are not a use but rather an abuse of the divine word—let them set forth all this with such eloquence, lucidity and clearness that the faithful may not only be moved and inflamed to reform their lives, but may also conceive in their hearts the greatest veneration for the Sacred Scripture.

—Pope Pius XII in *Divino afflante Sfflritu*, Sept 30, 1943 (*Rome and the Study of Scripture* [St. Mehird. Ind., 1946] I. pp. 102 f.

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## PROLONGED FASTING AND THERESA NEUMANN

The recent book by Miss Hilda Graef,<sup>1</sup> arguing strongly against the supernatural character of "the case of Theresa Neumann," evoked widespread and lively comment. Some of the comment has been sharply opposed to Miss Graef's conclusions; more of it has been in general agreement with her outlook. While it might seem that the case has, for the time being, reached a stage where nothing can be settled merely by further discussion, there is at least one point that does merit consideration. Not only is it, in many respects, the crucial point in the particular case of Theresa Neumann; it is also a point which is of wider interest than her particular case and has more than a little apologetical significance. It is the question of prolonged complete fasting, sometimes technical<sup>1</sup>}, called *inedia*.

As is generally well known, it is claimed of Theresa Neumann that she has been living for years without eating or drinking. More exactly the claim is that since August, 1926, she has taken no nourishment of any kind, excepting only Holy Communion. From August, 1926, to September, 1927, she took no liquid other than a few drops of water after Communion to help her swallow the host, and since September, 1927, she is said to have taken no liquid at all.

Questioning the supernatural character of Theresa's fast, Miss Graef proposes two main alternatives. The first is that the fast is not even a reality. In defending this possibility, Miss Graef contends that it would not necessarily involve deliberate fraud on Theresa's part, that Theresa might be taking some nourishment while in a somnambulant state and therefore without herself being aware of it. Miss Graef does, nevertheless quote, presumably with approval, the opinion of another author that Theresa might be engaging in deliberate, though well-intentioned, fraud, a "pious

The other main alternative proposed by Miss Graef is that Theresa's fast, even though real, is not beyond the power of

<sup>1</sup> *The Case of Theresa Neumann* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press. Hill Miltz)

nature.<sup>4</sup> In support of this view, she appeals to the authority of Pope Benedict XIV, who expressed a similar judgment about long fasts in his famous work on beatification and canonization,<sup>5</sup> and to the authority of the late Fr. Herbert Thurston, S.J.,<sup>6</sup> a recognized expert in the *field* of mystical phenomena. Miss Graef mentions the main reason seeming to justify or even necessitate such a view—the fact that there have been some apparently well established cases of long complete fasts outside the Catholic Church.

Although Miss Graef, as far as can be judged, leans toward the former alternative, the unreality of Theresa Neumann's fast, it is the second alternative that concerns us more and that we would rather discuss first. This theory, that even the most prolonged and complete fast might be merely natural, has been cited with apparent approval by a number of the reviewers of *The Case of Theresa Neumann*. And, to come to the point, it is a theory that we think untenable and dangerous. Dangerous—not insofar as people might be tempted to try to put it into practice, with obvious disastrous results—but because of its bearing on the important question of the knowability of miracles.

If we admit that something so far above ordinary natural processes as a complete fast extending over months and years is nevertheless not beyond the actual limits of the complete powers of nature, it is difficult to see how we can avoid the conclusion that a natural explanation is equally conceivable for a least a great many other phenomena commonly accepted by the Church as miracles. That applies both to miracles related in Scripture and to "ecclesiastical miracles," for example those approved as evidence in canonization cases. Certain types of miracle, of course, are of a radically different nature from something like prolonged fasting, and a judgment about those types of miracle would not be seriously affected one way or the other by a judgment about the supernatural quality of prolonged fasting. The supernatural element in prophecy, for instance, and in other "intellectual" miracles, is of a quite different character from that present in a "physical" miracle like inedia. The supernatural element in some miracles can be seen and proved

*Mbid.*, pp. 52 f.

*sDe beatificatione et canonisatione* *monm Da*, Life. IV', Pars I, Cap. 27.

"*The Month*. Fdx. -March. 1921 ; Dec., 1930; Feb., Sept., Oct. **WI**; Nov, 1932; May. 1933,



indeed in some cases is less so, than in the case of prolonged fasting?

As regards Benedict XIV', it hardly need be pointed out that his view- was in no way a final decision on this matter. It was a personal opinion, which Benedict explicitly submitted to the judgment of the Congregation of Rites.\* And it was an opinion that was much more plausible in Benedict's time than it is today. In the eighteenth century the reasons behind the necessity of food and drink for human life were not nearly so well understood as they are now. One has only to read, in Benedict's chapter on prolonged fasts, the various opinions proposed by the doctors whom Benedict consulted, in order to see how vague and limited medical knowledge still was, at that time, concerning the precise purposes and functions of food and liquid taken into the human body. Some of the doctors suggested various natural explanations of the indefinite prolongation of human life without food or drink. As an example, we might mention one of the three explanations which Benedict ranked as the three most likely. According to this theory nourishment *is* necessary for man only in order to replace the elementary body-fluid (*humor radicalis*) which is constantly being consumed by the natural heat (*calor nativus*) of the body, and if the heat and the body-fluid are equal there is no consumption of the latter, and consequently no need of nourishment.®

We do not mean to ridicule the scientific knowledge and theories of those days <› to suggest that the science of our own day has given us a complete and perfect picture of human physiology and nutrition. But we do sa} that, whereas it was reasonable enough to hold the natural possibility of a prolonged complete fast in the light of the physiological knowledge of two centuries ago, the same view *is* not tenable in the light of all the detailed and firmly established knowledge we have today regarding the functioning of the human body and the use and need of both food and water. The body, for instance, has to have a certain amount of energy for every single action it Performs, internally or externally. And the whole constitution of the body, the whole structure of the muscular system, of the nervous system, of the various organs, is such that these could not

- "L't nostram tandem promamus sententiam, quam sacrae Congregationis iudicio libenter subjicimus ...." (*loc. cit.*, n. 14).

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conceivably get and use the energy they need in any other way than by the assimilation and oxidation of something at least essentially the same as ordinary, material, visible, organic food. It would be contrary to the whole nature of the human organism to suppose that the needed energy could be supplied by some invisible, direct operation of the soul, or by atomic energy, or cosmic rays, or in any other such way basically different from the normal way. To suppose that the human body could receive and use, for its entire requirements, energy provided in any such extraordinary way is to suppose a radical change in the very constitution of the body, a change which itself would simply involve a miracle in a different form.

That is only one part—and only a bare indication of that one part—of the entire line of argument. A more explicit presentation of the argument would take too long to give here, and any attempt at it would only be deceptively inadequate. We have treated the evidence at some length elsewhere and would refer an interested reader to that discussion? We repeat that, as we see it, the natural possibility of a complete fast extending over months and years is irreconcilable, not just with present scientific theory, but with thoroughly established facts of physiology in particular and physiology in general.

Since the gap or disproportion between natural cause and actual effect in prolonged fasting is so obvious. If Benedict's time, he could more easily admit a natural explanation of this phenomenon without weakening the case for miracles. But that is no longer so today. We were glad to note that Fr. Raulonvek, S.J., the author of *My Sister Theresa Neumann*, agrees that Benedict's opinion on the particular point is no longer tenable.<sup>10</sup>

We might remark, parenthetically, that we have here a good place of ammunition for use against the claim that the progress of science has weakened the case for miracles. On the contrary, the regress of science has strengthened the case for miracles. The progress of science, by giving us a constantly clearer picture of the

<sup>10</sup> *Miraculous Abstinence. The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology* No. 100 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1946).

<sup>11</sup> *«Stigmatisée de Meaux» (Paris: ... 1950), p. 8.*

operations and limitations of the forces of nature, has enabled us to be more and more certain that a given phenomenon is beyond those natural limitations. The question of living without eating or drinking is a good example.

But what about the alleged cases of long fasts outside the Church? Incredible as these might seem at first mention, it must be admitted that they cannot be lightly brushed aside. There have been a number of such cases claimed and some of them in quite recent times. Just within the last four years there were two such reports, one of a girl living in China, who was believed to have gone without food during the previous nine years, and the other concerning a lady in India, reputedly living for more than thirty years without eating or drinking. It must also be admitted that the evidence in favor of some of these cases is not altogether unimpressive.

Nevertheless, it can also be said that in none of these cases is the evidence of the kind that can be called conclusive. An examination of the proof available will show that in every case there is room for reasonable suspicion of mistake or deception of some kind. There is added ground for suspicion when it is realized that in many known fraudulent cases of extended fasting, the impostor had, before being unmasked, succeeded for a long time in convincing even some supposedly prudent persons of the reality of the fast. In one or two instances the supposed fasting person even managed to take some food or drink during a period of observation conducted—obviously not with very great care—to determine whether the fast was genuine. All things considered, it is not being overly skeptical to hold that among the alleged natural cases of prolonged fasting, first outside the Church and also within the Church in circumstance» strongly contraindicative of extraordinary mystical gift-, there has not been any one case which is beyond question, And in such cases, until there is conclusive evidence, certainly the preferable explanation is that the fast is not real.

But even if we had to grant that the fast were real in one or more of these cases, it would not follow immediately that it was natural. Miss Graef seems to hold that if such fasts take place outside the Church—and she believes they have—they must, by reason of that very fact that they are outside the Church, be natural. And she declares that the case of Mollie Fancher “even if it were the only

case of a complete fast outside the Church (which it is not) untenable the opinion that a complete fast carried on must be of supernatural origin." Very possibly Miss Graef agree that the argument does not follow quite that simply. It is true that the circumstance that in these alleged natural cases the subject was not a Catholic, even though perhaps devoutly religious, or, conversely, was a Catholic but not ingly religious, would in itself constitute a strong pre against the supernatural character of the fast. But it definitely exclude a supernatural character. The supernatural remains a possibility', especially since there are two ways that possibility might be realized. A supernatural origin fast does not necessarily mean a divine origin. It could be origin. Benedict XIV allowed for the possibility of the de the main agent in some otherwist- inexplicable l'g fasts. ( tier, from an indirect remark sin ::Co-s, :li;t Miss Graef i: of Benedict's opinion in this particular regard.) It must in granted that in most of the cases under consideration there is or no apparent sign of the devil having had a hand in the just as there is likewise no apparent reason for ex divine intervention in these same cases. But the mere tact th tan see no external evidence of, or reason for, either diabolic intervention does not altogether preclude sucii don. And it does seem to us that, supposing there has « fast outside the Church or carried on by a more or Iesj Catholic, rather than admit the possibility of a merely explanation it would be more reasonable, indeed necessary, that the explanation is supernatural, that the fast is ot eit"e' c" a > r rmiraculous origin, even though we can see no mrtne. If the devil's agency or God's influence in the particular c^e. seems to us to be simply a matter of maintaining that when some tiwig is, in itself, clearly supr"::s:i:-a'. :t must he supe.n -ra . spite of some apparent external indications to the conL3'M - ai'. these contrary indications, in the type of case under ».on».t are of the negative and inconclusive kind "«weighed by stronger reasons on the side 'l \ \_ = j3i Explanation. In other words, there can hardly be—saort 0 a ZV /w auirIKr ®vme revelation—anv altogether competing pro., .



of diabolic or divine intervention in a particular case. And even if the subject of a prolonged complete fast himself denies absolutely that he is dependent for his power in any extraordinary way on God or any preternatural agency, we think it must be held that, if he does actually live without eating or drinking, he is dependent on some special supernatural intervention, regardless of what he himself thinks or says.

Naive as such a view might seem at first glance, it is no different from what Catholic theologians generally, or even universally, hold, and must logically hold, regarding other types of miraculous phenomena. We maintain that the sudden complete cure of an organic disease is beyond the powers of nature. Christian Scientists claim to have obtained such cures. We might question the reliability or accuracy of their accounts, but in accord with sound theology we admit the possibility of such cures among Christian Scientists, and at the same time we insist that if they do take place among Christian Scientists, they are supernatural, in spite of the fact that Christian Scientists themselves would deny that the cures are miraculous or supernatural in our sense of those terms. The same would apply, for example, to levitation, which we rightly maintain is supernatural, even though there have been some well attested cases of it outside the Church. To take still another example, if someone other than Christ were to come along and, unmistakably, change a few loaves and fishes into food for a multitude, we would be convinced, and correctly, that his feat was supernatural, regardless of who he was or what his character or what he might say. And we must take the same view of anybody who proves that he can live without food or drink.

To repeat, we do not see how we can question the miraculous character of prolonged complete fasts without undermining the knowability of miracles in general. We believe Fr. Thurston let the door open wide for all of our miracles to walk out and disappear when he asked in this connection, "Is it possible that in the course of a century or two the views now prevalent with regard to nutrition and metabolism may be revolutionized by discoveries as far-reaching in their consequences as those of Sir J. J. Thomson, Rutherford, Franck, and Hertz concerning the constitution of matter?"<sup>1</sup> If anyone can show how we can allow a natural explana-

<sup>12</sup> *The Month*, Oct., 1934, p. 341.

tom of prolonged fasting and still defend other miracles, such as miraculous cures, we will be happy to be shown.

Up to the present we have spoken of fasts of the most extraordinary type from the standpoint of length, fasts of not just a few days or weeks, but of months and even years, fasts over an indefinite period. We have been dealing with the view of Benedict XIV and of Fr. Thurston, as endorsed by Miss Graef, and it is dear that what they uphold is the natural possibility of fasts of even such extreme length, of many years' duration. Obviously, shorter fasts will be closer to, and even within, the bounds of nature: one would maintain that a fast of a few days, even though complete, is necessarily supernatural. The possible length of a merely natural fast will vary with a number of factors. A person can go longer without food than without water. And he will need both food and water much sooner if he is active during the fast than if he remains at rest: the length of the fast will be in close inverse relationship to the amount of activity. It is on this natural basis the well-verified accounts of Hindu fakirs: "Suspended animation," go as long as a man can without food or water. By a type of self-hypnotism the fakirs put themselves in a trance in which they sink to such a minimum that they appear as though dead. In such a state the consumption of energy is so low, and consequently the subject will survive till after a comparatively long time. [Here, in explaining how the fakirs can achieve "suspended animation," but, granting the statistics, then, understanding how they can go so long without food, an entirely different thing with the fasting fakirs, during the fast, in a considerable amount of activity.

Applying such considerations to Theresa Neumann, and more particularly to the two weeks during which she was under constant observation, in July, 1927, it can be said that if the 'actual' record of just those two weeks are true, the fast is not a natural fast but a supernatural. During those two weeks she ate and drank a total of four hours. She was up for a few hours each day in the church (with the nuns, who were with her). She could not walk, and she could not see. For two weeks without water. It was a miracle.



by the "little" food which they say Theresa might take while in a sort of somnambulant state. But whatever they might intend, it must be insisted that the amount of food, and of water, necessary for a person of Theresa's size and activity cannot, naturally speaking, be below a certain minimum. The same natural laws which demand food and water at all for the continuation of human life, demand a definite and rather substantial amount of food and water. It can easily be calculated that a person of Theresa's weight and degree of activity could no more get along, naturally, on a few ounces of food a day than she could on none; she would require at least a pound of food just to provide the energy she consumes. Is it credible that Theresa might get that amount of food, day after day, not only without herself being aware of it, but, as Miss Graef supposes, without even her family being aware of it? It seems to us that the simple reality of Theresa's fast is a good deal more credible than such an hypothesis. Moreover, this hypothesis of eating or drinking in a trance could not apply, and Miss Graef admits it could not apply, to the period of two weeks' examination, during which Theresa was, at every moment, under the direct observation of the sisters. And, once again, if Theresa did not eat or drink during those two weeks, her fast was, and is, supernatural.

It must be confessed, however, that one argument against the reality of Theresa's fast, emphasized by Miss Graef in company with other authors, cannot easily be dismissed. That is the refusal of a second examination. Theresa says she herself is willing to be examined again. But her father is opposed to it, and Theresa believes—in fact, she says Our Lord has told her—that in this matter she should obey her father's wishes. Much has been said by Theresa's advocates in defense of her stand in this regard and in defense of her father's position. Her father himself says that he was assured that one examination would be sufficient; he says he agreed to the first one on that condition, that there would not be another. He also claims he has reason to fear what doctors might do to Theresa in another examination, in view of the statements some doctors have made, even to him directly. And he also argues that if there were a second examination, some people would want a third, and there would never be an end of the demand. It occurs to us that Mr. Neumann might also argue, with some good reason, that a second examination would likewise mean little to tho^e who

may that even if Theresa does live without eating and drinking, this may be just natural.

We ourselves had the opportunity of discussing the matter with Mr. Neumann, one day in 1948. We added our appeal, for whatever weight it might carry, to that of a German physician who was in Konnersreuth at the same time, mainly for the very purpose of exploring once again the possibility of inducing Theresa and her father to allow an examination outside her home, in a Catholic hospital. And we could not help being impressed by the apparent sincerity of the good old man's objections.

Nevertheless it can hardly be denied that the reasons presented by Theresa and her father for refusing another examination are not completely satisfying in view of the serious and public nature of the matter and the undoubted advantage that would derive from certifying Theresa's fast under circumstances still more unobjectionable than in the first examination.<sup>17</sup> An examination somewhere other than in the Neumann home and under otherwise more stringent conditions would be all the more convincing and is a reasonable request. Particularly is it difficult to be content with the reasons given for refusing another examination when the request for it comes from the whole Bavarian episcopate and even from the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. It seems dear that Theresa's own bishop, the Bishop of Regensburg, Liutprand's refusal as casting some doubt on the genuineness of this state of affairs, the ecclesiastical authorities can take no responsibility for the reality of Ute's alleged inedia.<sup>15</sup> And since that

<sup>17</sup> It must also be admitted that the urine, of the urine analysed during and immediately after the examination for isotope argument against the certainty of the fast. The urine analysed during the examination both showed strong traces of acetone. But an analysis made two days after the examination showed traces of acetone, and an analysis just after the examination showed all of acetone. The two latter analyses are added as evidence against Theresa's fasting. Although these results are not absolutely conclusive with a total and therefore supernatural fast lasting during and after the examination, their physiological significance is not so small as is sized as valid ground for suspicion.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Miss Graef, *op. cit.* p. 107. Dr. Max Jordan has written to the Regensburg Chancery giving some details of the case.

appears *to* be the most authoritative statement the Church has made on the matter up to the present, a similar reservation of judgment would also appear to be the most prudent course for us. Meanwhile we can hope that some change of mind or turn of events in the Neumann family will open the way to a second examination, which should serve to settle the matter one way or the other.

One way or the other. For there are only two possibilities. Theresa's fast is either genuine, in which case it is supernatural, or it is an outright and deliberate fraud. The hypothesis of unconscious fraud seems to us altogether untenable. The hypothesis of a genuine but purely natural prolonged fast is also, we believe, definitely untenable. That is the one point in the matter that is most certain, and that we have thought most deserving of emphasis, that if Theresa does live without eating or drinking her life is a continuous miracle. As to whether she actually' does live that way, we think the evidence—aside from, and in spite of, the refusal of another examination—is in favor of the reality' of the abstinence. But we would not stake our life on it: nor our faith.

Thomas Pater

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Norwood, Ohio

toward another examination. (Ct. *C-ur Sunday t-'isifer*, News Section, June 17, 1951.) But it is to be noted that this statement was made in November, 1937, whereas the pronouncement of the Bishop of Regensburg, quoted above, was made December 10, 1937.

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#### Freedom of the Church

What torrents of benefits would be showered on the world: what fight, order, what peace would accrue to social life; what unique and precious energies would contribute to the Church, teacher of justice and love, that liberty of action to which, in virtue of the Divine Mandate, she has a sacred and indisputable right! What calamities could be averted, what happiness and tranquillity assured, if the social and international forces working to establish peace would let tk?"'-K-'ves be permeated by the deep lessons of the Gospel of Love in their struggle against individual or collective egoism!

—Pope Pius XII in *Summi pontificatus*, Oct. 20, 1939  
(NOW C translation, p)j>. 38 f.1

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