

RUFFIN, C. Bernard (1991): *Padre Pio: The True Story*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, Huntington, Indiana

This well researched and sensitively written book documents the life and experiences of one of the most remarkable men of the twentieth century. As discomfiting as it may be to many, the life of Padre Pio profoundly reflects the essential truth carried in the Christian understanding of human embodiment. Padre Pio himself, as one who bore the wounds of the crucified Christ, projects historical truth. He shares this witness with others such as St. Francis of Assisi and Theresa Neumann, each of whose lives shattered the certainty of what had been considered the limits of the possible.

Pio's early experiences as novice and young monk confirm the reality of what every authentic spiritual tradition has known about the practice of ascetic disciplines. His self-mortifications were extreme and possibly excessive, but led him to experience equally extreme and unanticipated results. The activation of psychic energy through his spiritual practices unleashed demonic forces which literally made his life hell. And Pio lived fully the paradox of the heavenly grace bestowed in the actuality of the stigmata, experienced concurrently as indescribable and agonizing physical pain.

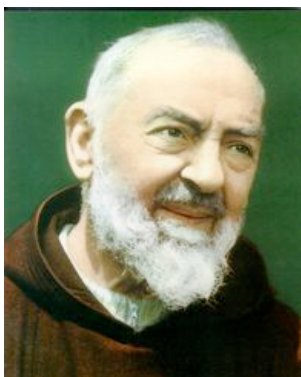
His life has served to restore meaning to the difficult notion of redemptive suffering as a way of dealing with the inevitable pain of human life. In this sense, he shares much with the understanding of Sr. Josepha Menendez of the Society of the Sacred Heart who, during the early 1920s, herself underwent extraordinary suffering and torment infused, again paradoxically, with divine ecstasy and insight.

In many ways, Pio's life overturned the modernist denial of the miraculous and the numinous. He lived the impossible. The method of acquisition of the stigmata of Christ resonates strongly with the experiences of St. Francis of Assisi, and would test the imagination of even the most adventurous writer of fantasy. For Pio, the inhabitants of hell-worlds were no longer the construction of archaic myth-makers, but actual presences with whom he actively contended. He possessed in great measure many of the siddhi, or perfections described in the Yogic literature of India. Yet he never claimed these attainments as his own. He was truly a great priest of Jesus, who lived a life of dedicated service and humility.

His mission was also marked by extraordinary works. The creation of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza is an extraordinary accomplishment from which untold thousands have benefited since its construction in the 1950s. Yet to the end, Padre Pio claimed no exalted status, but rather, remained in a surprising state of ambivalence regarding his own relationship with the Divine.

Padre Pio of Pietrelcina represents yet another remarkable enigma born of Italian Catholic spirituality. His life served to reaffirm the traditional values of Roman Catholicism in the climate of an escalating materialism and nihilism which subverts and denies the essential truth taught and lived by Jesus of Nazareth.

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Padre Pio was almost an exact contemporary of Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), the German Lutheran theologian who, out of a regard for the difficulty modern men and women have in accommodating the traditional teachings of Christianity to their twentieth century perceptions, devised a theology that "demythologized" the Gospels, stripping away such uncomfortable baggage as miracles and other accoutrements of a "first-century worldview" in order to get at what he believed to be the essential kernel of truth underlying all the mythological paraphernalia. Bultmann's approach (or at least variations of it) has strongly colored much of the theological

thinking of the last few decades. . . .

Bultmann wrote in *Kerygma and Myth*: "It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits." Yet Padre Pio, Bultmann's contemporary, convinced many a learned man that angels appeared to translate letters he received in foreign languages, that he cast out devils, and that he was, on many occasions, knocked bodily to the floor by irate demons. p. 16

Not everyone was impressed by Padre Pio. In the 1920s he was denounced to the Vatican as a fraud by several prestigious priests and theologians, chief among whom were Padre Agostino Gemelli, a renowned physician, psychologist and theologian, who insisted that Padre Pio's stigmata were due to hysteria, and the powerful archbishop of Manfredonia, Pasquale Gagliardi, who swore on his pectoral cross that the controversial wounds were self-inflicted, and worse, that their bearer was demon-possessed. Dr. Amico Bignami, chief of pathology at the University of Rome, wrote a report in 1919 confirming the existence of the stigmata but implying that the wounds were the result of autosuggestion. Although those who tried to prove Padre Pio a madman or a fraud ultimately failed and, in several cases, were themselves discredited, there are some who still believe that the capuchin was a skilled hypnotist or worse, a warlock in league with the devil. p. 17

By the time Fra Pio was beginning his studies for the priesthood, non-traditional religious thinking was making its inroads into nearly all Christian denominations. Led by priests such as Alfred Fermin Loisy in France, George Tyrell in England, and Romolo Murri and the youthful Ernesto Buonaiuto in Italy, biblical scholars of the Modernist movement were seeking to reinterpret Roman Catholic dogma and doctrine in light of modern science and philosophy. Questioning the inerrancy of Scripture, they contended that biblical writers of both the Old and New Testaments were conditioned by the times in which they lived and that, therefore, religious truth was subject to a constant evolutionary process. Rather than the inner life, emphasized by many traditional religious teachers, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, they tended to stress social reform. They provoked a strong reaction from leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, and in 1907 Pius X condemned Modernism as "the synthesis of all heresies." Eventually most of the leaders

of the movement in the Roman Church were forced from the priesthood or left voluntarily. p. 56

Long before Vatican II, Padre Pio insisted that his disciples study Scripture. "As regards your reading matter," he wrote, "there is little [contemporary literature] that is admirable and nearly nothing that is edifying. It is absolutely necessary for you to add to such reading that of the Scriptures, so recommended by the Fathers of the Church." p. 56

This comment of Padre Pio reflects a tolerance of the banality and emptiness of much of the print media of the time. He did not condemn it outright, accepting that we are in the world with its follies, but urged a periodic return to the perennial values and moral guidance provided by sacred literature.

Besides the Scriptures and the early Church Fathers, Fra Pio studied thoroughly the teachings of the Dominican St. Thomas Aquinas and the Franciscan St. Bonaventure, whose writings centered on the building of an inner spirit of prayer and devotion, and whom Pope Leo XII described as "the prince par excellence who leads us by the hand to God." He was most influenced by the two Spanish Carmelite mystic theologians, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Their teachings about prayer, contemplation, self-detachment, and the inner life embodied the spirit of the Capuchin Order at that time. p. 57

In the tradition in which Fra Pio grew to spiritual maturity, more souls were thought to be won to Christ through the suffering of devoted men and women than through preaching, writing, or "personal witnessing". The idea of offering oneself as a "victim of divine love" is implied in much of what St. Theresa, St. John, and others wrote, but it seems to have been only in the century preceding Padre Pio that certain devout people came to make specific acts of offering themselves as "victims." p. 50

From the beginning of his seminary studies, Fra Pio heard voices and experienced visions. The modern reader, even the modern Christian reader, may tend to be somewhat skeptical about alleged visions and supernatural voices, preferring to pass over this aspect of Padre Pio's life. One cannot do this and still understand Pio, since his contact with the invisible world was an essential aspect of his existence. . . .

Padre Pio had numerous bodily visions of celestial as well as infernal beings who were as vividly present to him as were his flesh-and-blood colleagues. As we will see, he claimed that he was actually beaten and bloodied by demons and that he actually kissed the hands of Christ. p. 61

The oscillation between extreme exaltation and violent depression is a common experience among mystics. Both St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila spoke of a "game of love," in which God seems, by turns, to hide and then return to the soul. At times Pio was "almost in paradise"; at other times, he felt as if Satan were about to snatch him out of the Lord's hands. Benedetto assured him that this was a normal part of spiritual growth. . . .

To the very end of his life, however, he never felt that his salvation was entirely secure. Far from being of the "once saved, always saved" school, he felt that the possibility of being lost remained as long as life on earth lasted. Toward the end of his life, when they were walking together, Padre Pio horrified his friend Pietro Cugino by asking him, "Tell me seriously, do you think I'll be saved?"

p. 77

On the afternoon of September 7, 1910, Padre Pio appeared at Pannullo's office and showed him what appeared to be puncture wounds in the middle of his hands. *Pati* asked him what had happened. Pio told him that he had been praying in the Piana Romana when Jesus and Mary appeared to him and gave him the wounds. Pannullo examined the young man's hands, then insisted that Pio see a doctor. . . .

A few days after seeing [Dr.] Cardone, Pio went to Pannullo. "*Pati*, do me a favor," he said. "Let's pray together to ask Jesus to take away this annoyance. I do want to suffer, even to die of suffering, but all in secret."

"Dear son," replied Pannullo, "I'll help you to pray and ask Jesus to take this annoyance away. Yet, if it is God's will, you must yield yourself to do his will in all and over all. And remember, since this is for the salvation of souls and for the good of the entire world, you must say to Jesus, "Do with me as Thou wilt." The two men prayed, and the wounds went away - for a season. . . .

It was another year before he could muster the courage to tell his spiritual director about the stigmata. He did so after the wounds had reappeared, a year to the day after their first occurrence. On this occasion, Padre Pio wrote:

"Yesterday something happened, something I cannot explain or understand. In the middle of the palms of my hands there appeared a small red spot the size of a small coin, accompanied by a strong, sharp pain in the middle of the red spots. The pain was most intense in the middle of the left hand, so much so that I still feel it. Also I feel some pain in the soles of my feet.

This phenomenon has been going on for almost a year, yet recently there has been a brief period of time in which it has not occurred. Please do not be upset that I have not mentioned it to you before. The reason is that I had to overcome a cursed embarrassment to tell you about it. If you only knew the great effort I had to make to tell you about it! I would have told you many things, but I was unable to express myself." pp. 78-79

Padre Agostino observed that Padre Pio went into ecstasy two or three times a day. On seven occasions, the professor sat with pen in hand and transcribed everything that Pio said. Other ecstasies were, for various reasons, left unrecorded. These celestial encounters, in which Pio seemed to converse with Jesus, Mary, and his guardian angel, were usually either preceded or followed by diabolical vexations. The heavenly colloquies, Agostino observed, were usually longer than the infernal visitations, usually

lasting between a half hour and forty-five minutes. The satanic visions usually lasted less than fifteen minutes.

In all, Padre Agostino observed ten "diabolical apparitions." The first was the vision of a black cat. On another occasion, Pio had a vision of naked women who "danced lasciviously" in his room. Another time, the devil, invisibly, spat in his face. On yet another occasion, Pio complained of hideous noises that no one else could hear." p. 85

This description of Padre Pio's experiences bears a remarkable similarity to those of the Spanish nun Sr. Josefa Menendez, of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who, at much the same time, at the convent of Les Feuillants in France, was undergoing a near-identical alternation of divine and demonic visitations.

When he went into ecstasy, Padre Pio was heard to talk, quite coherently, with various unseen celestial visitors. Agostino wrote down only what Pio said, seeing or hearing nothing of those to whom he was speaking. From Pio's words, however, it is possible to catch a sense of the dialogue. During these encounters, Pio prayed for conversions, pleaded, and even argued with God for the salvation of various people. He voiced his fear and horror of the devil. He expressed a desire to bear the cross. He prayed for the stigmata to return - but invisibly. He bewailed the worldly conduct of modern priests. Pio expressed concern that his illness might lead to his expulsion from the Capuchin Order. Most of all, however, Padre Pio addressed words of exalted love to his Saviour and Lord. p. 86

Again, we see in Ruffin's account an uncanny parallel between the phenomena experienced by Padre Pio and those experienced nearby by Josefa Menendez, Both Pio and Menendez expressed identical concerns and offered their sufferings towards the attainment of the same ends.

Evelyn Underhill observes that mystics and visionaries very often suffer from ill-health, frequently from undiagnosable illnesses. SS. Bernard of Clairvaux, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, and Catherine of Genoa are in this category. Miss Underhill felt that the usual poor health of many mystics may be caused by "the immense strain which the exalted spirit puts upon a body which is adapted to a very different form of life." p. 92

The people of Pietrelcina sensed that there was something different about Padre Pio. He continued to observe "the discipline" on the customary days, striking himself with a metal chain until the blood ran. When he was praying at his hut in the Piana Romana, the curious would peer in to see "the mad monk." *Mammella* would make his bed, but Pio considered it too luxurious and insisted on sleeping on the ground with a rock as his pillow. This continued until Giuseppa, disgusted, reported it to Marquess Giuseppe Orlando . . . who was lord of a nearby castle and surrounding estate. The marquess called on Pio and explained to him that his conduct was a breach of the obedience he owed his mother. Thereafter Pio slept on the bed. p. 97

Such extreme acts of self-castigation are totally out of step with the temper of the present times, and are interpreted by some as severe aberrations of spirituality. Yet the life and influence of Padre Pio as experienced by many in subsequent decades showed him to be a man of great grace and unusual attainment. He has clearly walked a very particular path reserved for but few souls who inhabit the earth, and his actions and methods should not be seen as representing anything other than his own unique destiny. Criticism of his way as masochistic and pathological is utterly inappropriate, springing as it does from an impoverished understanding that cannot accommodate such self-effacing sacrifice. Although Nicolas Berdyaev perceives ascetic self-torture as being contrary to the spirit of the gospels, it has nonetheless been integral to the life of many within various traditions. Berdyaev, when discussing Western and Eastern Christian mysticism in "Spirit and Reality" makes the following observation: "Such phenomena as stigmata are unacceptable to Eastern thought. Nor do disease and physical suffering play such an important part as they do in Catholic mysticism. . . Eastern mysticism is predominantly that of resurrection whereas Western mysticism is mainly that of crucifixion."

In April of 1912 or 1913, all the trees in the area were infested with lice, and the fruit crop was threatened with ruin. One day "a simple peasant" approached Padre Pio and asked him to come to his field to bless the trees and curse the lice. Padre Pio consented. The peasant was amazed that within a short time all the lice had fallen to the ground. When they heard about this, farmers for miles around begged Padre Pio to go through their fields cursing the lice on their trees. It was claimed that the lice on all the trees died and that an excellent harvest ensued. p. 100

Accounts of demonic and poltergeist activity in the Tower are better documented. Neighbors reported terrible noises - crashes, bangs, and shouts - coming from Pio's apartment, and they complained to his parents. At first they thought that his flat must be the scene of drunken brawls. Certainly the room bore evidence of terrible physical altercations. When they reached their son's apartment, Gra and Beppa found things thrown about the room, and Pio in a state of collapse. Seeing the disorder, they asked him with whom he had been fighting. "With those foul creatures," Pio said.

This incident can be corroborated by a letter Padre Pio wrote to Padre Agostino on January 18, 1913, in which he described a diabolical attack. He says that he saw "nothing at first" but heard a "diabolic noise," after which a number of demons appeared "in the most abominable form." When Pio refused to do their bidding, he reports: "They hurled themselves upon me, threw me on the floor, struck me violently, and threw pillows, books, and chairs through the air and cursed me with exceedingly filthy words. It is fortunate that the apartments beside me and below me are vacant!"

It is obvious that Pio is not using a metaphor for an inward temptation or a state of mind. He saw and heard and apparently felt specific phenomena - phenomena which, despite the vacancy of the adjoining apartments, were heard by neighbors several doors away. pp. 101-102

Even in the darkest depths of spiritual anguish, Padre Pio did not lose contact entirely with the spiritual world. Even when he cried out that God had forsaken him, he was able physically to converse with Jesus, Mary, and his guardian angel, and confer with them on various questions that his superiors put to him. What would continue to cause him anguish to the end of his life was the fact that although heaven often made clear the status of the souls of others, he remained in the dark about his own. p. 113



All of Padre Pio's spiritual life was directed at the raising of modern-day Lazaruses. All of it fed into his ministry for the salvation of souls. Frequently he prayed to God, echoing Moses: "Either save this people or blot me out of Thy book of life!" Once someone told him of a prophecy that a member of the Franciscan Order would lead a third of the world to Christ, implying that it referred to him. Padre Pio retorted: "What do I want with a third? More! More! I want to bring everyone to God!" p. 115

Pio frequently renewed his offering of himself as a victim for various intentions. In July, [1918] Pope Benedict XV urged all Christians to pray for an end to the world war, which was still raging; and on July 27, despite his sufferings, Pio offered himself as a victim for the end of the war. "No sooner had I made this offering," he wrote, "than I felt myself plunged into a terrible prison and heard the crash of the gate behind me." From that moment, every minute of the day he felt as if he were in hell. . . .

This is what befell Padre Pio on August 5, 1918. He wrote Padre Benedetto: "I was hearing the confessions of our boys . . . when suddenly I was filled with extreme terror at the sight of a heavenly Being who presented Himself to the eye of my intellect. He held some kind of weapon in His hand, something like a long, sharp-pointed steel blade, which seemed to spew out fire. At the very instant that I saw all this, I saw that Exalted Being hurl the weapon into my soul with all His might. It was only with difficulty that I did not cry out. I thought I was dying. I told the boy to leave because I felt ill and did not feel that I could continue. . . This agony lasted uninterruptedly till the morning of the 7th. I cannot tell you how much I suffered during this period of anguish. Even my internal organs were torn and ruptured by that weapon. . . From that day on I have been mortally wounded. I feel in the depths of my soul a wound that is always open and causes me continual agony.

Pio's letter leaves it unclear whether a physical wound was involved, but in a deposition made in 1967, Padre Pio stated unambiguously that a visible, physical wound in his side resulted from the experience. pp. 151-152

In a deposition made to a confrere in March 1966 (forty seven years later), Pio declared, "All of a sudden a great light shone round about my eyes. In the midst of this light there appeared the wounded Christ. He said nothing to me before he disappeared." In an interview on February 1967, he was pressed into further detail. The crucifix in the choir

transformed itself "into a great Exalted Being, all blood, from whom there came forth beams of light with shafts of flame that wounded me in the hands and feet. My side had already been wounded on the fifth of August of the same year."

It is clear that Padre Pio, at least by the end of his life, identified the "Exalted Being" who appeared to him in August and September of 1918 as Christ. When the ecstasy ended, Pio was on the floor, his hands, feet, and side dripping blood. p. 153

This incident bears a remarkable similarity with the experience of St. Francis of Assisi at La Verna on the night that Francis himself received the stigmata.

For the next seven centuries, [after the death of St. Francis of Assisi] at least four hundred individuals, nearly all Roman Catholic, most of them female and Italian, were reported to have borne the stigmata, in various forms. In some cases, such as that of St. Catherine of Siena, the wounds were invisible - that is, involving pain but without any physical lesion. In others, as in the case of St. Clare of Montefalco, an Italian Augustinian nun, in whose heart was found in her autopsy a fleshy growth shaped like a crucifix. Some stigmatics were marked with only the wound in the side; others with only the crown of thorns. . . Although most stigmatics were reputed to manifest some sort of mystical gifts, the existence of the wounds was not in every case a sign of sanctity. Not a few stigmatics were frankly "weird" if not truly unbalanced.

There were several stigmatics contemporary with Padre Pio. The best known was a Bavarian laywoman by the name of Therese Neumann; eleven years younger than Padre Pio, she received the stigmata in the side in 1925 and wounds in the hands and feet the following year. These persisted until her sudden death from a heart attack in 1962. Her hand and foot wounds were similar to those of St. Francis, as they were described by a physician who reported: "On the back of the left hand I see a nail-head, rectangular in shape, slightly longer than broad, in line with the hand. The rectangle it forms may be fifteen millimeters by ten; its edges are filed down and almost sharp, like those of an iron nail forged on an anvil. The mass of the nail-head is slightly convex, rounded in dome shape. It shows numerous planes, not defined, like those produced by the blows of a smith's hammer on a piece of iron-work. The color is reddish brown, like an ancient wax seal."

Like Padre Pio, Neumann was reportedly subject to bilocations, visions, ecstasies, and raptures. During most of her adult life, allegedly she had need of neither food nor sleep. Neumann, who at one time was better known than Padre Pio, has been praised by many as a woman of saintly character, but damned by others as a neurotic and a fraud. Those who knew her described her as a happy, loving, openhearted woman, full of vitality and energy. She once sent her greetings to Padre Pio and asked him to pray for her. pp. 158-159

One of the most extraordinary characteristics of Padre Pio's stigmata was the peculiarly fragrant aroma of the blood that issued from them, notwithstanding the normal character

of its chemical composition. Some witnesses, in fact, claimed that the blood was unusually "shining" and even that rays of light were seen to be emanating from it. p. 164

At the center of the nascent hostility towards Padre Pio was the sixty-year-old archbishop of Manfredonia, Monsignor Pasquale Gagliardi. It is difficult to know what he was really like, because he has been almost entirely forgotten by everyone except those who hated him. Even allowing for exaggeration, the charges against Gagliardi are so grave and so numerous that it is impossible to see him in a favorable light. . . .

It is alleged that fairly early in his career as archbishop, Gagliardi had been arrested by civil authorities on charges of raping a nun but that he was not prosecuted. Apparently, even in his sixties, Gagliardi was on several occasions publicly accused of sexual molestation and unchastity. On one occasion Gagliardi's valet testified that his employer was sexually corrupt.

Although Gagliardi was never formally accused of homosexuality, there were numerous complaints that he showed a preference for priests who had been convicted of this vice. In a report made to the Vatican in 1927, it was alleged that Gagliardi refused to remove from his assignment as archpriest of Carpino a priest convicted of sodomy in both the lower and appellate court, and agreed to remove the man only when he was actually jailed. He named a gay cleric archpriest of Vico despite the fact that the unhappy man had been convicted three times for sodomy. Another priest was appointed by Gagliardi, even though the archbishop was aware of an extensive police record for "continual and habitual pederasty." It was further alleged that Gagliardi accepted expensive gifts from homosexual priests who received coveted appointments. pp. 185-186

In the 1920s, however gifted and promising he had been in earlier years, Gagliardi, whether through mental instability, substance abuse, or sheer satanic perversity, was increasingly guilty of conduct unbecoming to a churchman. Allegedly, he neglected to visit his parishes to administer the sacrament of confirmation with the result that in many parishes many years passed without the administration of that sacrament. Moreover, it was reported that he stripped churches of valuable art on the pretext that he was selling them to benefit the poor, when in reality he did so to pocket the revenue. As early as 1919, when a riot broke out against him in the town of Vieste, he was wildly hated by the people of his archdiocese. . . .

Gagliardi was at the time celebrating mass in a side chapel. A crowd of six hundred men, women, and children burst in and pelted him with stones and bricks. Despite the fact that the prelate was saying mass, the mob charged the altar, grabbed his missal and paten, threw them at him, knocked him to the floor, and began to punch and kick him, until several priests intervened to drag the archbishop into an adjoining room, slamming the door against the raging crowd.

As the surging mass of people cursed and pounded the door, two policemen arrived and escorted Gagliardi from the church through a back door. The mob, realizing what was

happening, poured into the street and surrounded the archbishop, the policemen, and the priests. A group of angry women with butcher knives seized Gagliardi, and ripping off his vestments while the men chanted obscenities, were about to castrate him, when just in time, a contingent of state troopers (*carabinieri*) arrived to rescue the prelate intact and carry him, unconscious and bleeding, to his mansion, where he was bedridden for a month. pp. 187-188

Immediately after the accession of Pius XI, [in 1922] Gagliardi went to the Vatican in person and gave him an earful about the dreadful friar who, with his mercenary cronies, was tearing his archdiocese apart. Among other things, Gagliardi deplored Padre Pio's "horrible manner of hearing confessions" that left souls "in a state of agitation." With an expression of downcast contrition, Gagliardi lamented to Pius, "I think I have to answer to God for having authorized Padre Pio to hear confessions."

According to Gagliardi, Padre Pio was more than a misguided, undereducated, superstitious backwoods friar; he was a demoniac. Gagliardi went so far as to denounce Padre Pio to the bishops and archbishops of the Consistorial Congregation which regulated all matters concerning the government of dioceses. He insisted: "Padre Pio is demon-possessed. I declare to you that he has a devil and the friars of San Giovanni Rotondo are a band of thieves. With my own eyes I saw Padre Pio perfume himself and put make-up on his face! All this I swear on my pectoral cross!"

Moreover, he declared that Pio habitually slept in the friary's guest room, where he was attended by young girls with whom he took liberties. Gagliardi also charged that the friars had been paying newsmen to write sensational stories about Padre Pio and invent accounts of miracles and conversions. The capuchins, he claimed, were living in "unspeakable luxury," even to the extent of parting and pomading their hair! Moreover, Gagliardi charged that the friars were raking in huge sums of money. Some of them, he claimed, had literally come to blows, actually drawing blood over the pocketing of the filthy lucre. . . .

Throughout 1922, Gagliardi encouraged hostile priests to forward anonymous letters of denunciation to Rome. Whereas [Pope] Benedict had refused to read such denunciations and upbraided Gagliardi for forwarding them to him, Pius now directed that the acrimonious correspondence be handed over to the Holy Office. pp. 189-190

We have seen how Padre Paolino recounted how many people came to San Giovanni Rotondo who seemed to be demon-possessed. Although Padre Agostino in his writings, claimed that by this time Padre Pio was free from the physical demonic attacks of earlier years, he still had to confront the powers of hell in persons manifesting apparent demonic possession. p. 203

Padre Alberto D'Apolito, when an altar boy of fourteen, witnessed an exorcism conducted by Padre Pio on a Sunday afternoon in May 1922: "After Vespers and Benediction . . . we returned to the sacristy, where we found a possessed woman, who, upon seeing Padre Pio, began to scream and curse. Padre Pio, impassive and serene, took the book in his hands

and began the exorcisms among the screams, the curses, and the foul words of the possessed woman. Suddenly she gave forth a very loud scream and, by an invisible force, was raised in the air to a height of three feet. At that moment, everyone began to run with fear. Padre Pio, without getting upset, continued the exorcisms with faith and energy, in a ruthless struggle with the devil, who, finally vanquished, freed the woman. p. 204



What convinced the friars of demonic influence in persons whom psychologists might describe simply as psychotic was the presence of supernatural phenomena, as in the case of a young wife who had lain for a year in a coma and, when carried into church one evening during Vespers, awoke while Padre Pio was blessing the congregation with the Blessed Sacrament, and "snorted like a bull." Her body then, according to witnesses, began to swell like a balloon. After the service, Padre Pio hurried the woman and her husband into the sacristy and began the formal rite of exorcism. While he prayed, the snorting, ballooning woman tried to claw him. When he finished, the woman became calm and assumed a normal appearance, took her husband's hand, marveled at her disheveled appearance, asked for a comb and walked out. p. 205

In November 1921, Benedetto expressed concern to Pio about the younger priest's "fits of temper" in the confessional. Pio attributed them in part to overwork, but confessed that the sight of so many hardened and unrepentant sinners moved him to an anger reflective of God's indignation. p. 206

Padre Pio spent many hours at his mother's bedside until, at 4 am on January 3, 1929, the summons came. In the words of Francesco Morcaldi, who was also there: "Her death was truly beautiful. She breathed her last serenely while they were praying. Unaided, she raised the crucifix, pressed it to her lips, [and died]."

When the breath left Giuseppa's body, Padre Pio uttered a heart-rending scream and collapsed, sobbing for hours on end, "*Mammella! Mammella! My beautiful Mammella! My sweet, darling Mammella!*" His grief shocked everyone. He seemed absolutely shattered. He was unable to return to the friary or even attend the funeral. For days on end, he wept and wailed like a baby. Suor Pia, too, collapsed, and lay prostrate for days in her cell in Rome with an extremely high temperature. . . .

Within days of his return to the friary, Padre Pio had resumed his normal duties. It was a long time, however, before he made anything approximating a full recovery. When Padre Bernardo requested him to write some meditative essays, Pio respectfully declined on the grounds that his mother's death had broken him to the extent that he was temporarily quite unable to write. p. 227

One of Padre Pio's dearest friends was a Tuscan physician, Dr, Guglielmo Sanguinetti, affectionately called "Willi." On the evening of January 20, 1936, Willi and two other

laymen were visiting with Padre Pio in his room. Suddenly Padre Pio knelt down and asked them to pray "for a soul that is soon to appear before the tribunal of God." They all knelt down and prayed. When they arose, Pio asked, "Do you know for whom you prayed?" When they replied that they did not, he said, "It was for the king of England." Sanguinetti was surprised, as the local papers had been reporting that the king was suffering only from a touch of the flu and was in no danger. "It is as I say," replied Pio, and changed the subject.

At around midnight, Pio knocked on the door of young Padre Aurelio of Sant'Elia a Pianisi, who was busy writing a biography of a recently deceased confrere. When Aurelio opened the door, Pio, without entering, told him, "Let us pray for a soul which at this moment is to appear before the tribunal of God - the king of England." The two priests prayed for a while, and then Padre Pio returned to his room.

The next afternoon the Italian newspapers announced the death of George V, King of England. . . .

Early in 1936, it was clear that the seventy year old monarch was slowly dying of heart and lung problems. Only after fifty years would it be revealed that his physician, not only to end the old man's sufferings, but so that the news of the king's demise would occur at a time convenient for reporting by the local papers, euthanized the king by a lethal injection of cocaine and morphine. At 11:55 on the night of January 20, about the same time that Padre Pio appeared at Padre Aurelio's door, surrounded by his family and while the archbishop of Canterbury rendered the prayer that begins, "Go forth, Christian soul," King George looked at his doctor, said, "God damn you!" and died. p. 241

[Dr. Sanguinetti reported the following story] "During the war the Americans had an air base at Bari, about 75 miles from here. There were still Germans in the neighborhood and the American officer in charge at Bari heard they had a munitions dump in or near San Giovanni Rotondo. So he called his officers, planned a raid, and said he would lead in the first plane. He was a Protestant. When they neared San Giovanni Rotondo he saw high in the air, ahead of the plane, a monk with arms outstretched as if to ward off his coming. The General was stupefied. He ordered the formation to return to base and drop the bombs in an open field where they would do no harm. When he returned to base and was asked how things had gone, he related what he had seen. An Italian officer present told him there was a monk at San Giovanni Rotondo whom the people consider a saint. Probably he was the one the General saw in the heavens. The General determined to find out. He and another came here and together they went to the sacristy with other laymen to watch as the fathers came down for mass. He immediately recognised Padre Pio as the one he had seen high in the air in front of the plane. p. 250

The only account of any of these incidents that gives a precise date is that given by Padre Bonaventura Massa in 1975. He gives as his source "Graziella Siena and many others." According to Massa, it was July 26, 1943 when "big bombers were circling the skies of San Giovanni Rotondo," attempting to bomb the public school, where the commanders believed

a cache of German munitions was hidden: "The fliers tried twice to release the bombs, but the apparatus would not function. . . . As they continued flying they saw in the sky . . . a cloud containing three people: a bearded Friar, a woman with a child in her arms, and a young man with a sword unsheathed. They returned to the base without completing their bombing mission." p. 252

Work on *La Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* began in earnest immediately after the war. On October 5, 1946, the *Casa* was incorporated as a shareholding company with a capital of one million lire and a thousand shares of one thousand lire each, to be divided among the shareholders, each of whom signed a document renouncing any profit. . . .

Three days after the *Casa* was incorporated, land was donated for the hospital by Maria Basilio, a wealthy lady from Turin, who owned land adjacent to the friary. The following day Angela Serritelli donated a parcel of land that she owned adjoining the Basilio donation. p. 281

During the late spring and summer of 1947 tons of mountainside were blasted away, and by the end of the year the foundations of the hospital had been laid.

Money remained a problem, as Padre Pio refused to seek bank loans; and despite a gift of three and a half million francs from Emmanuele Brunatto, now a wealthy Paris businessman, after a few months, the *Casa's* treasury was empty and the work was in deep trouble. It was then that the English economist and conservationist Barbara Ward came to the rescue. She was in Italy during the summer of 1948 to write a report on the postwar reconstruction of that country for her magazine, *The Economist*, and was particularly interested in the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), of which the deputy director in charge of field operations was her fiancé, Sir Robert Jackson. Ward learned of Padre Pio and his work from her friend, the Marquess Patrizi. . . .

Ward and Sanguinetti began to wonder whether the *Casa* might qualify for aid from UNRRA, which had as its priority the restoration of health services in war-ravaged areas.

. . . . Ward contacted her fiancé, Commander Jackson, asking for funding for the hospital as part of the rehabilitation of the Foggia region. Almost immediately, on June 21, 1948, the UNRRA awarded a grant of four hundred million lire to the Italian Government for *La Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza*. To Padre Pio's immense rage and stupefaction, the Italian government passed on only two hundred and fifty million lire to the *Casa*. The failure of the government to make the entirety of the grant available for "The Work" (as the project came to be called) was looked upon by Pio as an act of thievery. It is said that to the end of his life he never forgave the Italian bureaucracy. . . .

On July 26, 1954, the outpatient clinic of the *Casa* was blessed by Padre Pio and opened. pp. 282-284



On the first anniversary of the inauguration of the *Casa*, Padre Pio announced plans for a medical and religious center that included (1) nursing homes for both men and women, "where tired and exhausted bodies and souls can be with the Lord and obtain succour from Him"; (2) an "Intercontinental Study Center" "to stimulate medical people to perfection in their professional culture and Christian studies"; (3) a center for the prayer groups; (4) a "cenacle" for priests; and (5) retreat houses "where men and women will be able to care for their spiritual development and their ascent to God." Later he expanded his vision to include the establishment of Christian day-care centers as well as institutions for the training of handicapped and retarded children. "These are not simply my works," he insisted. "They are God's works, just as He shows me." p. 287

Despite his increasing weight, Padre Pio was anything but a hearty eater. . . He never ate breakfast, occasionally had a cup of coffee in the morning, and seldom, if ever, had anything more than a few cookies and a glass or two of cold beer or fruit juice in the evening. The only meal he took in the refectory was the midday dinner. Even then, according to Dr. Sala, Padre Pio "took only forkfuls of food," not nearly enough "to support his body." Don Giorgio Pogany likewise recalled, "No human being could live with the little amount of food that Padre Pio ate. He ate almost nothing." Padre Giovanni of Baggio insisted that Pio ate "perhaps a fifth of the amount eaten by a normal man." Father Dominic, who sat next to him at table, in response to an article that claimed that Padre Pio lived on a diet consisting of but a few mouthfuls of vegetables and a few sips of lemon juice, wrote, "He eats also macaroni, cheese, peas, beans, fruit, liver, etc., and, as all good Italians, he drinks a glass of wine." He also occasionally enjoyed fried sausage and dried ham. But everything was eaten in minute quantities, and frequently he handed much of the food that was served to him to the men sitting next to him. p. 289

Padre Pio, like his fellow stigmatist Therese Neumann, was clearly sustained by more than bread alone.

Padre Pio likewise needed very little sleep. Although one of his confreres contended that he was known to go as long as three years without sleep, Dr. Sal, as well as those priests who lived in closest proximity to him, insisted that this was not true. However, he seldom slept more than three or four hours in twenty-four nor had the desire to do so. p. 290

From 1918 until about 1923, Padre Pio heard confessions fifteen to nineteen hours a day. After that his superiors limited his hours in this activity. During the 1940s and 1950s he generally heard confessions five to eight hours a day. He heard women's confessions in the morning in the traditional booth. Men he heard face to face in the afternoon in the sacristy, often with his hands on their shoulders. p. 294

It is estimated that Padre Pio heard over two million confessions over a fifty-one-year period. Of these, most were "normal." Yet reports are too numerous to refute the contention that at times he displayed an intuition that was clearly supernatural. Typical of these stories was that of Clarice Bruno, who spent less than two minutes in the confessional booth. The moment she entered, Padre Pio announced, "I will do the talking." With that, he began "reciting" her sins to her, pausing between each one only long enough for her to confirm it by saying, "*Si, Padre.*" At one point he said, "You have been impatient and lost your temper, but you immediately repented." Clarice remembered how she had lost her temper the previous day with a restaurant waiter, and murmured, "I hope I repented." "I *said* that you repented right away," Pio affirmed sternly. "He was not asking - he was telling me," Clarice recounted. Then, "Suddenly, in the middle of the confession, contrary to custom, and before I had, therefore, the occasion to formulate my question, he gave me the advice that I, in that moment, particularly needed." He absolved her and closed the little door between them and turned to the next penitent. The confession over, Clarice left the church feeling "lighter" and "at peace with God." p. 296

Like St. Francis, he had a remarkable affinity for nature. A radiologist, Dr. Nicola Centra, contended that one day in 1956, while Padre Pio was talking to his friends, a flock of birds "began to settle all around, as if they were obeying a summons." Within a few minutes "the entire garden vibrated from a symphony of blackbirds, sparrows, goldfinches, and other birds who all chirped, whistled, and trilled, accompanied by the sounds of crickets and cicadas." The noise from the feathered visitors was so great as to drown out the human conversation. It was then that Padre Pio looked up at the trees, put a finger on his lips, and said, "That's enough." According to the physician, "The effect was like pouring water on a fire, with not a sound heard; a silence such as that found in a cathedral descended upon them." p. 305

By the mid-1950s the friary had its television room, but Padre Pio was not a frequent visitor to that room. In fact nobody remembered him ever darkening the door, except for such an event as the funeral of Pope Pius XII, when he stood in the doorway, watched a few minutes, and then went away. Not only did he profess to have too little time for the "tube," but he felt it was a pernicious invention that corrupted morals and destroyed family life. When Maria Pyle asked him if she should acquire a set, he discouraged her. He told Joe Peterson, "The man who invented refrigeration went to heaven, but the man who invented television . . ." concluding his remarks by pointing downwards. p. 306

The writings of the early Church Fathers indicate that in the four or five centuries that followed the time of the Apostles, miracles - while not perhaps as numerous or dramatic as those performed by Christ and the Twelve - nonetheless occurred at certain times and places. While the Egyptian writer Origen (~185-254) insisted that only "traces" of the signs and wonders which Christ wrought were visible in the Church of his day, his older contemporary, St. Irenaeus (~120-202), who ministered in what today is France, wrote that miracles were taking place on a regular basis among his flock in Lyon, miracles that included even the raising of the dead. St. John Chrysostom (344-407), who ministered in what is now Turkey, in some of his writing seemed to imply that miracles (or at least

certain types, such as prophecy and tongues) were no longer common; but his contemporary St. Ambrose (~335-397), bishop of Milan, reported at least one case of a clear miraculous intervention. St. Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo, in what is now Tunisia, wrote a great deal about miracles. p. 310

Many mainline Protestant churches, true to the teachings of their founders, firmly rejected the idea of the miraculous in the modern world. In the accounts of the lives of such prominent leaders as John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Grandison Finney, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Dwight Lyman Moody there is to be found little mention of the supernatural, at least in the tradition of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox saints. . . .

On the other hand, among Roman Catholics, the tradition of *charismata* associated with saintly individuals remained very strong. The procedure for beatification and canonization established in the eighteenth century by Pope Benedict XIV requires the proof of at least two miracles, wrought after death, as confirmation of the Church's judgement on the sanctity of the "Servant of God." p. 311

Normally, Padre Pio was reluctant to speak about supernatural phenomena; but, as we have seen, in his correspondence with his spiritual directors, he professed continuous contact with his guardian angel, who not only protected him from enemies, both human and infernal, but also performed such mundane tasks as translating letters written in foreign languages. However the skeptic may be inclined to explain the phenomena which Padre Pio attributed to angel activity, it is beyond question that he was convinced of the physical and literal intervention of angels in his life. p. 315

Like Moses, whose face glowed so brilliantly after communicating directly with God that he had to wear a veil to keep from dazzling the children of Israel, Padre Pio reportedly, at prayer, was sometimes seen to glow with supernal light. According to one of his confreres, on one particular occasion he observed Pio's "countenance shining with a rosy flame of light such as I had never seen before and, shall, I think, never see again." p. 320

Padre Pio, evidently, was never interested in analyzing the phenomenon [of bilocation]. He was interested only in doing God's will. "Whether it's true or not that I am found in various places by bilocation, trilocation, or whatever," he told a confrere, "you must ask God and not me. All I can tell you is that I always try to remain attached to the thread of His will. For this reason, I am always where I am."

There was one question about bilocation that Padre Pio could and would answer clearly and directly. Asked what language he employed in his "travels," he replied, "Italian. And how many miracles would you want the Lord to perform?" p. 329

In his approach to disease, Padre Pio differed somewhat from many practitioners of "healing ministries." Unlike many "faith healers," Padre Pio never taught that one has the right to claim a healing. Very seldom did he lay hands on the sick, much less say, "Be

healed." Most of the cures took place apart from the Padre's physical presence. "I don't remember any healings here at San Giovanni, but I heard people thanking him for being cured," Padre Alessio recounted. "The healings happened, not here, but away."

In his approach to those who besought from him a grace for healing, Padre Pio was undramatic, making every effort to draw attention away from himself. If approached in person, if he made any response at all, he usually said, "I will bless you," and very quickly and perfunctorily made the sign of the cross over the head of the afflicted. Often he would say, "Let's pray to God." Father Joseph Pius recalled only one instance in which Padre Pio laid hands on the sick. A little boy from California was brought to him, suffering from bone cancer. Despite the gesture, Pio never promised a cure, and none resulted.

"I know from experience," Padre Alessio recalled, "that when Padre Pio said to the sick person, "I'll pray for you" or "Let's pray to God," the sick person was going to be healed. On the other hand, if he said, "Let's resign ourselves to the will of God" or said nothing at all, the grace of healing was not to be." pp. 339-340



Although he founded a hospital "for the relief of suffering" and often prayed for and obtained material - even financial - blessings, he did not believe that physical health and prosperity were necessarily normative, much less that their absence signified a deficiency in one's commitment to God. Stressing the value of redemptive suffering, Pio often told those whose prayers he knew could never be granted to accept their pain and offer their anguish to God to be

joined to that of Jesus for the redemption of souls. Accordingly, he looked with favor when certain persons declined a gift of healing that was available so as to offer their suffering as a sacrifice to God. p. 344

To those who hailed him as a miracle-worker, Padre Pio answered that he was merely a poor sinner who prayed and encouraged others to do likewise, pointing out that healing comes from God and God alone. When thanked for healing a sick person, Padre Pio was embarrassed and insisted, "Don't thank me. Thank God." p. 346

After the death of Pope John on June 3, 1963, Padre Pio's confreres pestered him to reveal the identity of the next pontiff. The padre tried to ignore them until the importunities of Padre Eusebio became unbearable. Finally he told him, "It's going to be Montini. Now will you be quiet?"

Paul VI was disturbed by the restrictions that his predecessor and the Holy Office had placed on Padre Pio and accused Cardinal Ottaviani of confining the capuchin "like a criminal." . . . The Pope sent [Padre Clemente] to San Giovanni on September 8,

charging him, "Liberate Padre Pio from those restrictions. Make the work of Padre Pio easy so that he can fulfill his apostolate." . . .

Asked to comment on the role of Pope John XXIII in the Maccari investigation, Padre Clemente commented in 1971, "Popes are men like ourselves; a lot depends on who is around them, like with President Nixon and Vietnam. Even though they are Popes and can issue any order they want, their conduct really depends on their counselors who surround them. The Popes are obliged to follow certain patterns. There were those who did not believe in Padre Pio's holiness. Pope John XXIII listened to those counselors, and because of them he imposed the rigid restrictions. There were other incidents that happened, but I cannot talk about them now - it would be improper for me to talk about them". p. 362

The rampant materialism and immorality that Pio saw all about him drove Pio nearly to despair. He increasingly warned that television was destroying family life: instead of talking to each other, he pointed out, family members spent evenings staring at the set. Pio strongly advised his spiritual children not to buy TV sets or watch television. He became increasingly negative about the movies, insisting that "the devil is in the cinema." Of course, the miniskirt and other revealing fashions of the age provoked a violent reaction.

Padre Pio seemed to see a vision of the future that filled him with horror. When questioned as to what coming years would bring, he often replied, "Can't you see that the world is catching on fire?" There are many reports of grim and grisly prophecies, such as a catastrophe that would result in the death of a third of the world's population, but none can be confirmed. One friar implied that he did make prophecies privately, but that they were too unsettling to disclose. . .

What saddened him immeasurably was the attitude of dissent and unbelief that seemed to pervade the church. He was almost embittered by the protests and criticism leveled at the pope and at the Church by radical priests, nuns, and laity. He was distressed at the decline in vocations, especially in the Capuchin Order. More than once he was heard to remark, when he learned of some negative development, "Thank God I am old and near death!" p. 364

One day, looking over the immense throng assembled in the square, Pio observed, "If all the devils that are here were to take bodily form, they would blot out the light of the sun!" p. 367

As he approached his eightieth birthday, Pio's health worsened further. His sight was so bad that he requested and received a dispensation from his obligation to pray the Daily Office. His legs were not only weak, but were numb as well, and he was given permission to say mass in a seated position. He suffered from excruciating attacks of "kidney colic" and his chest pains grew worse and were now accompanied by what his physicians diagnosed as cardiac arrhythmia. His shortness of breath was so severe that at times he could barely speak. So feeble was he that he could no longer even turn in bed and had to be assisted in dressing, bathing, and other necessities. "I am reduced to a state

of helplessness," he lamented. "May the Lord call me now because I am no longer able to be of any use to my brethren." p. 371

By now the stigmata were disappearing. For more than a year, they had disappeared from his feet, although his feet hurt so intensely that it proved a veritable martyrdom when one of his assistants put on his socks and sandals. The wound in the side no longer bled, and, by the spring of 1968, the stigmata on the hands were vanishing. By summer there were now only scabs, with just a touch of redness. One of his attendants, Padre Onorato, recognized this as a sign of approaching death, "The ministry was finished, so the signs were finished." p. 372

Incredibly, Padre Pio, at times, seemed to doubt that he was in a state of grace. "You have respect for me," he told a friend, "because you do not know me. I am the greatest sinner on this earth." Complaining that every good intention was marred by vanity and pride, he insisted, "I am not good. I do not know why this habit of St. Francis, which I wear so unworthily, does not jump off of me. The last criminal in the world is nothing compared to me. Compared to me, he is a gentleman. Pray for me that I might become good." He now asked his confreres to pray for "final perseverance" and continued to deprecate himself. "I am afraid to meet Christ. I have not corresponded to His love and to His Infinite graces." p. 373

These enigmatic comments of Padre Pio made towards the close of his life cast the reality of relativity into sharp relief. Did Pio hold dark secrets, or was he so conscious of the nature of perfection that the minor foibles which constantly assail everyone in the course of their daily life, became for him the source of great angst and self-recrimination? Perhaps the self-expectation of those who have truly transcended human limitation and who fully inhabit spiritual reality is beyond the comprehension of humanity at large. Perhaps also, this attitude may reflect the folly of complacency and hubris in considering one's relationship with the Divine.

It is beyond dispute that the extraordinary priest was associated with numerous paranormal phenomena. He had open wounds in his hands, feet, and side that defied all attempts to heal, or even define them, medically or psychologically, wounds that mysteriously healed, just before his death, without leaving a scar. There is overwhelming testimony that he had a super-normal ability to scrutinize the hearts of those whom he had never met, with the result that many came away from him declaring, "He knew more about me than I knew myself." It cannot be questioned that he was associated with a mysterious aroma that, like the wounds, defied (and continues to defy) all attempts at explanation. Nor can it be questioned that, in response to his prayers or counsel, various individuals experienced sudden and unexplained changes in bodily or mental or spiritual health. It is also clear that many individuals testify that he seemingly "bilocated" to various places on earth, not only from San Giovanni Rotondo, but, after 1968, from another world! p. 397

When we look at what Padre Pio *did*, we see not only paranormal wonders but humanitarian works as well. Pio established a first-rate hospital in an area previously notorious for the inadequacy of its health care. He set up institutions for the aged and physically handicapped. He also exerted political influence, leading some to insist that he used his prestige to defeat the Communists in the polls in Italy after World War II. He advised many of Italy's political leaders and even the heads of some foreign states, like Francisco Franco in Spain. He had a tremendous influence on inculcating traditional values in several generations of Italians. p. 397

Satya Sai Baba, who claims to be an *avatar*, or an incarnation of God, is reported to heal incurable sicknesses and even raise the dead. He is said to be characterized by the same sort of aroma associated with Padre Pio. He has been known to change water into gasoline and sand into religious books, as well as materialize objects such as food, jewelry, watches, rings, pictures of himself, as well as a peculiar sacred ash known as *vibhuti*. Yet Sai Baba's message is radically different from that of Padre Pio. While the capuchin was so humble as to doubt his salvation and tried to deflect all homage from him to Jesus, the Guru openly declares that he is God. Whereas Padre Pio insisted on radical holiness on the part of his spiritual children, Sai Baba is said to make few moral demands on his disciples. p. 398



Whatever one may think of his *charismata*, the propriety of his offering himself as a Victim of Divine Love, whatever one's opinion may be of his ministry or his theology, or even of his personality, there can be no doubt that Padre Pio gave himself over entirely to his Lord. The most fervent atheist will be forced to admit, even if he believes that the padre dedicated his life to a delusion, that his commitment was total. His entire life

was given over to God and to the service of mankind. The only thing Padre Pio cared about in this world was saving souls. To him, every soul was the object of a concern so powerful that he was willing to immolate himself on its behalf. p. 401