



Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT



STIGMATA IS LUCY RAE FOR REAL?

by Albert James Dager

Great expectancy rises within the crowd that has come to witness what is said to be a wonder of God: the marks of Jesus' sufferings appear mysteriously on a woman who claims they are evidence of His healing power.

As she mounts the stage at T.L. Osborn's International Gospel Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the bloody wounds have already appeared on Lucy Rael's hands and feet. Someone brushes back the front of her copious hair to reveal drops of blood on her forehead. The back of her dress is opened; across the lower portion of her back are red streaks which, we are told, are the marks of the scourging Jesus endured before being led away to the cross.¹

Never in the annals of evangelical Christianity has anything like this been demonstrated. Stigmata—the mysterious appearance of the marks of Jesus' suffering—has been a Roman Catholic earmark.

A HISTORICAL BRIEF OF STIGMATA

The term is derived from the Greek root *stigma*, meaning "mark"—particularly a brand impressed by iron. It is found only once in Scripture where Paul wrote, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). This passage has been quoted by some stigmatics to allege that Paul was their forerunner. But Paul was alluding to the branding that characterized a slave, for that was the common use of the term. His own sufferings through beatings and persecutions proved him a slave to Christ (II Corinthians 11:24-27).

Some say that the earliest reported cases of stigmatization go back to 330-350 A.D.² Others say that there are no known

cases prior to Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), and that his stigmata were of a character never seen subsequently: "in the wounds of feet and hands were excrescences of flesh representing nails, those on one side having round black heads, those on the other having rather long points, which bent back and grasped the skin."³

According to Francis of Assisi's biographer, St. Bonaventure, in *Legenda S. Francisci*, Francis received the stigmata only two years prior to his death. From that time the incidences of stigmata increased considerably, with over three hundred cases being documented by A. Imbert-Goubeyre, M.D. in *La Stigmatisation* (2 v. Clermont-Ferrand 1894-95; 2 ed. 1908).⁴ However, this documentation came under criticism from many, including Roman Catholic theologians, because of the dubious nature of a number of cases.⁵

Two observations from history are that stigmatization occurs primarily among women, and most stigmatics have been members of two Roman Catholic religious orders, Franciscan and Dominican.⁶

Stigmatization seems to occur most frequently after Lent, usually on Good Friday, when the minds of the religious are fixed on the sufferings of Christ.⁷

The degree of infliction varies, and may be grouped in the following series:

1) Full stigmatization with visible manifestations of the five wounds, and blood oozing from intensely painful open sores; 2) pain but no visible manifestations; 3) visible manifestations but no pain; 4) imprints of wounds on the heart rather than on the surface of the body.⁸

There are other manifestations which are uncommon, such as oil dripping from the palms of the hands, aromas that are usually pleasant and associated with certain flowers, elongation of the body, levitation, and other individual characteristics.

Numerous cases involving self-mutilation for reasons from fraud to penance for sin are also reported. Extreme cases occur every Easter season in the Philippines where some have themselves impaled on crosses to emulate the crucifixion. This is done as a form of penance in order that they or loved ones not have to suffer long in purgatory. But it is done openly with no allusion to the miraculous.

Among Catholics, particularly in countries dominated by that religion, it is not uncommon to witness self-mutilation and self-flagellation as forms of penance.

ROMAN CATHOLIC RESPONSE

In official pronouncements on seeming miracles the Catholic Church is often careful to exercise caution and even skepticism. But these cautions do not easily find their way to the church's members.

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states the Roman Catholic Church's position on stigmatization:

Some think that stigmatization is attributable to a particular act of God, if the stigmatic person is distinguished for his piety; otherwise it must be regarded as caused by the intervention of the devil. This solution supposes as evident that stigmatization always surpasses the powers of nature. Such a position is untenable. Moreover, according to Catholic doctrine, there exists no intrinsic connection between sanctity and stigmatization. God can grant charisms, such as stigmata, to any person, even one in a state of mortal sin or one outside the Church (Benedict XIV).

Another theory, which is now held by many theologians and Catholic scholars, is that stigmatization is attributable to purely natural causes, so long as the contrary has not been proved. Such an attitude seems to correspond best with the reluctance of the Church to settle this problem. Outstanding theologians caution us not to be hasty in attributing stigmatization to a miracle; for psychophysiological sciences may in the future show such attribution to be untenable.⁹

Whatever reason Catholic theologians have in approaching stigmatization with caution, they present good justification to question its validity:

Again, if stigmata are the effect of a miracle, why is it that a nervous weakness or even hysteria is a necessary condition for their appearance? All stigmatized persons, whose life we know in some detail, gave evidence of this illness.

Among the stigmatics, some had the body wound on the left side, whereas many others had it on the right side. Yet

Christ had the wound on one side, not on two. This inconsistency can be explained. When a person in a cataleptic state (induced, e.g., by hypnosis) is asked to repeat the movements executed before him, he will repeat them mirrorwise; that is, if the left arm is extended, he will invariably extend his right arm. In the same way, an ecstatic person reproduces Christ's wounds seeing Christ before him. Furthermore, in modern times, under the influence of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, the trend has been in favor of the left side, the side of the heart.¹⁰

DEMONIC MANIFESTATIONS

Stigmata have often been observed in conjunction with occultic manifestations. This has most often been coupled with a strong devotion to Mary, such as in the case of Brother Gino Burresi, O.V.M. (1932-), the stigmatic of San Vittorino in Italy. Burresi's stigmata first manifested after his strange visitation by another stigmatic, Francesco Forgione, known as Padre Pio:

Considered the only priest known in history to bear the Stigmata, Padre Pio was no stranger to Gino, who recalls that he once saw Padre Pio staring at him from the head of a stairway, even though he knew the priest to be elsewhere in Italy (a possible bilocation). On one occasion, Padre Pio told Brother Gino, "Prepare yourself." Later, September 23, 1968, he [Padre Pio] died. A year later, in Holy Week of 1969, after having the invisible Stigmata for twelve years, Brother Gino received the wounds in a visible way.¹¹

Padre Pio, a Franciscan monk, is perhaps the most famous stigmatic of recent history. In his biography, *Magic of a Mystic*, by the Duchess of St. Albans, his experiences are attributed to the miraculous intervention of God. But to those familiar with demonization, there is no doubt that the supernatural phenomena which manifested in his life were demonic. These included 1) bilocation: being seen in other places even though he had never left the friary;¹² 2) levitation: being lifted off the floor by unseen forces;¹³ 3) appearances of demons: on August 5, 1918, while hearing a boy's confession, he received a wound in his side from a "heavenly being" who hurled "a very long, sharp-pointed blade, which seemed to emit fire."¹⁴

It is said that angels prostrated themselves before Padre Pio, asking permission to perform their duties,¹⁵ and that he had been visited by Mary and Jesus.¹⁶

On the Sunday after his ordination as a priest, Padre Pio celebrated his first mass.

It was then that he offered himself formally as a victim for the salvation of sinners and the freeing of souls in purgatory. For weeks and months on end he constantly meditated on the sufferings of Christ. As a result, he himself endured frightful torments, both mental and physical.¹⁷

Padre Pio claimed his childhood was spent in "the constant presence of Satan and his legions, who were constantly lurking around his cradle in the form of hideous, terrifying monsters."¹⁸ His life's mission was the redemption of souls:

As a victim soul, he wanted to suffer as much as anyone could while remaining alive, in order to atone for the sins of humanity. As he explained, "I love souls as much as I love God."¹⁹

Padre Pio's experiences are not unique among stigmatics. Many of these manifestations have been observed in the lives of others. And it should be noted that stigmatization is not unique to Christendom:

Dr. von Amhard speaks of the frequent stigmata observed among Moslem ascetics who immerse themselves in contemplation of the life of Mohammed. These stigmata correspond to the wounds received by the prophet during his battles for the spread of the faith [A. Abadir, *Sur quelques Stigmatises ...* (Paris 1932)]. The occurrence of stigmatization among the Jansenists [members of a 17th-century heretical sect within Roman Catholicism] has been reported also.²⁰

One criterion for determining if supernatural manifestations are from God is the message that accompanies them. Padre Pio claimed that his own sufferings were atonement for the sins of others. This has been the message from many stigmatics who lack faith in the complete efficacy of Christ's atonement.

The Scriptures are clear that it is Jesus' blood alone that atones for men's sins (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14-20; Hebrews 9:7-14; etc.). There are no other mediators for salvation between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 12:24). To teach that redemption is by any other means either in place of or in addition to the blood of Christ is to bring another Gospel, which renders the bearer accursed (Galatians 1:8-9). Outward acts of piety and supernatural manifestations that occur apart from the true Gospel are not of God. They are mystical experiences that sway the gullible away from God's truth toward religious fables.

MYSTICAL RELIGION

It is a mark of all true stigmatics (as opposed to impostors) that they display a very mystical religious orientation. They tend to seek escape from their natural minds into the spiritual realm in order to experience a closeness to God. For mystics, ordinary prayer is insufficient to allow them a sense of God's presence, so they seek mystical encounters of the spirit. In so doing they open themselves up to demonic presences which appear as angels of light.

This is not to say that all mystical experiences are of Satan. But the only ones wherein the true presence of God is palpable are those which occur at His initiation, not the initiation of men. Those who intrude into the spirit realm by their own volition are treading on dangerous ground, seeking to enter into the presence of God on their terms rather than on His terms.

The presence of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit is sufficient for the true believer in Jesus. To seek beyond that—whether by repetitious prayer, songs, or meditation—is to disdain the gift of the Holy Spirit and to attempt to worship God as the heathen worship their gods. This is expressly forbidden by God's Word (Jeremiah 10:2; Matthew 6:7). Mystical religion, whether in the name of Jesus or false gods, goes beyond what the Father intends for us while we are in this sinful flesh.

The mystical approach characterizes many aspects of Roman Catholic worship, and has transferred to the evangelical church through the charismatic movement. Now certain phenomena that were reserved for Roman Catholic mystics are being observed among Protestants.

There has developed a tendency among charismatics to accept as if from God any supernatural manifestations that seem holy. Even the alleged appearances of the "Virgin Mary" at Medjugorje in Czechoslovakia have been attributed by David Duplessis (Mr. Pentecost) to the work of the Holy Spirit.²¹ This in spite of the apparition's message that all religious faiths are valid in the sight of God.

LUCY RÆL

Stigmata is now being witnessed among charismatics through the person of Lucy Rael, under the sponsorship of T.L. Osborn. Although Lucy was raised a Catholic, and has not renounced Roman Catholicism, she and her husband consider T.L. and Daisy Osborn their pastors.

As stigmatics go, Lucy Rael is unique. She does not claim to suffer for the sins of

others. Rather, she says her stigmata point to Jesus, and testify of His suffering.

T.L. Osborn exhorts us not to judge Lucy or her stigmata, claiming she is a sister in Christ who brings a message of healing.

I wouldn't say something's of the devil just because I don't understand it. Not when it brags on Jesus. I tell you, I will run with anybody that talks about Jesus!²²

The question remains, however, if Lucy's stigmata are from God, or are demonic manifestations, or if they are the product of an ecstatic trance, or a hoax.

That her stigmata result from a miraculous move of God is questionable for several reasons:

1) The wounds are in the palms of her hands (characteristic of all stigmatics), whereas anatomists insist that there is no way the weight of Jesus' body could have been supported on the cross by the fragile bones of His hands. He had to have been impaled through the wrists;

2) The lashes on Lucy's back run horizontally across her waist as if she had been wrapped tightly in a rope. They are not crisscrossed over her shoulders and upper back, and lack torn skin which would have been the result of Jesus' scourging;

3) All of Lucy's stigmata are very minor, and do not appear as would have been the case with Jesus;

4) As far as our research has been able to determine, no one has actually seen Lucy's stigmata appear. Rather, they have already been in manifestation by the time she has taken the stage. Not even her own secretary has seen them manifest from clear skin. When she takes the stage without the stigmata it doesn't manifest later in her appearance.

At a Good Friday, 1988, meeting at the International Gospel Center, two medical doctors were invited onto the stage to examine Lucy's hands. One, a Dr. Craig Rumedey, described what he saw:

I work in the City of Faith in the Emergency Department. I see a lot of lacerations, a lot of hand wounds. And both hands have what I would call superficial lacerations with dried blood, caked blood, and some fresh blood inside the wounds. The skin is obviously split apart, and there is what we would call epithemia, where the top layer of the skin is broken. And it is lacerated or cut down to the deeper layer of the skin. And on the backs of her hands I see dried blood on either side, on either hand, and what

we would call an abrasion or an obvious tearing of the skin on either side that allowed the blood to come and ooze through.²³

Another doctor, whom T.L. Osborn addressed as Dr. Loveless, confirmed Osborn's description of Lucy's stigmata:

Osborn: It looks to me like (of course I'm not a doctor, I wouldn't know how to describe it) I can see right down like the line in your hand—what do you call these lines in your hands?

Loveless: The crease.

Osborn: The crease in your hand. It's just apart isn't it? Like you'd taken a razor and just slitted it right down through and opened it right up.

Loveless: That's right.²⁴

Here we have a discrepancy revealed by T.L. Osborn himself. A razor-like cut is not similar to Jesus' wounds. His were punctures, not razor cuts. Not to mention dried and caked blood on what should have been fresh wounds. Likewise, "superficial lacerations" do not bespeak a duplication of Christ's wounds.

The question of fraud is always uppermost in the minds of those who see discrepancies such as these. So I wanted to give Lucy an opportunity to answer some questions relative to these discrepancies.

In repeated attempts to contact her by telephone I could only reach her secretary. My request for an interview was turned down by Lucy on the excuse that she does not give interviews. My request for photographs of her stigmata were also rejected.

The Osborns did not return my calls after several efforts to reach them for comments. So I was left with my observations of Lucy's performances on video tape, one of which is especially revealing.

LUCY GOOSEY

On Thanksgiving day, 1988, Lucy appeared as a mistress of ceremonies at "The Church Reunion," held at the Mabee Center of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa. Several prominent leaders within the charismatic movement were speakers during the four-day event.

On this occasion the stigmata did not manifest in Lucy's body. But something even more remarkable took place.

Calling songstress Vicki Jamison to come forward, Lucy had her close her eyes and look upward, as she had the audience do. To the accompaniment of the song, "Sweet Anointing," Lucy encouraged everyone to "Just close your eyes and worship Him." Her words to Vicki Jamison set the stage for an unsettling incident:

Sister Vicki, today you're going to have a visitation from the Holy Spirit. You're going to be anointed afresh and anew. You're going to feel the anointing of God come all over you when you minister.

The enemy has tried to destroy you. He's come against you in sickness. But God's not through with you... He's not through with you, sister Vicki. But you're going to have a visitation from the Holy Ghost this day, that you're going to go forth with such scope and power. Hallelujah! You're going to enter the second phase of your ministry.

While exhorting the audience to worship Jesus, Lucy reached with her left hand, palm closed, and placed it on Vicki's right shoulder, opening her palm downward. Vicki's eyes were closed, her arms lifted.

Praising God, Lucy removed her hand from Vicki's shoulder and placed it upon her forehead. As her hand lifted from the shoulder a small, white feather could be clearly seen to drop from Lucy's hand onto Vicki's shoulder. Lucy glanced at the feather but continued to praise God and walk elsewhere on the stage. Feathers began to drop where she walked.

Suddenly, Lucy stopped and, in a surprised tone, exclaimed, "There's feathers all over this place! Oh, my God! My God!"

Calling Billye Brim, another of the mistresses of ceremony, and Blaine Amberg, the host for the affair, to join her, Lucy continued:

A mighty visitation of the Holy Ghost! Hallelujah! Turn around [toward the audience] sister Vicki, very slowly; very slowly! Hallelujah! On your shoulder! On your shoulder! The visitation of the Holy Ghost! My God! We're having a visitation of the Spirit of Almighty... you say somebody said, "I don't understand this; I don't believe this!"

You know, the mind cannot receive the things of the Spirit! Sometimes the mind gets troubled! But Honey, glory to God! Get out of that natural mind and get into the supernatural! The supernatural power of God!

[Turning to people picking up feathers]: Are you finding some over there? Hallelujah! There's some over here! There's some over there! You say, "What does that mean?" The Dove of the Holy Spirit is flying all over this place!

My God! Worship Him!

Isn't it typical that mystics exhort us to "get out of your minds." But God's Word tells us that He has given us a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7).

Dr. Craig Rumedly used his mind and acquired two of the feathers. He sent them to Bob Jennings, an ornithologist and a naturalist at Oxley Nature Park in Tulsa. Mr. Jennings' conclusions:

1) The feathers had a straight edge at callus (the point where they attach to the skin). This is not characteristic of a feather that has been plucked out or fallen out;

2) The feathers were pure white and have a size and shape described as semi-plume-like, and are typical in size, shape, color, and appearance of down feathers;

3) The feathers had no cage marks and were therefore not from a caged bird;

4) The edges of the individual branches of the feathers were frayed in such a manner as to suggest the feathers were several weeks or months old or they had been handled "very roughly."

5) The feathers are definitely not from a dove or pigeon;

6) They are quite typical of the under-belly feathers of a large waterfowl, eg., egret, crane, heron, or goose;

7) They could well be goose down feathers.²⁵

It is blasphemous to fake the work of the Holy Spirit. But it's also serious to turn one's face the other way and act as if there is nothing to be concerned about. And this is the sad conclusion we draw regarding the prominent charismatic speakers present at the Church Reunion, including Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Fred Price, T.L. Osborn, Lester Sumrall, and Casey Treat.

It is my understanding that none of these men endorse what went on with Lucy Rael's performance. Yet none of them wish to address it. It was Willie George, from whom we received the video tape, who has spoken out in spite of censure by his charismatic peers who have told him in no uncertain terms not to "rock the boat."

I have areas of disagreement with Willie George's theology, particularly his endorsement of the Jesus-died-spiritually teaching. But I sense he has a heart for truth, and wishes to defend the integrity of the Holy Spirit's ministry. I pray the Lord will reveal to him the true nature of some of his associations within charismaticism.

But what does this sad affair say about those who have chosen not only to remain silent, but to censure Willie George for his part in exposing Lucy Rael's performance?

What does it say about those who carelessly proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord"? The sponsors of the Church Reunion stated in their advertisement, "The Holy Spirit

spoke to our spirits giving us God's plan for this meeting." Obviously, the Holy Spirit did not give them God's plan for that meeting. Is not repentance and a rethinking of one's position of leadership in order?

And what of T.L. Osborn's continued defense of Lucy Rael? He endorsed her stigmata as evidence that God would heal those whom she touches. On the basis of his faith in Lucy, he cursed a cancer in the body of a dying brother in Christ:

I pronounce Garland Mann healed of cancer in the name of Jesus, Son of the Living God!²⁶

According to a secretary at I.G.C., Garland Mann died a few months later.

In addition, Osborn made the following incredible diagnosis of a healed cancer:

She [Lucy] just put her hands on a woman with cancer. The cancer is dead! I know the cancer is dead! Hallelujah!²⁷

What is genuinely sad is that this "diagnosis" brought resounding applause.

Lucy herself prayed specifically for the healing of blind eyes in someone from the audience. Claiming that she saw the person in the spirit, she exclaimed, "Stand up!" But no one stood up.

I believe Christians have the right to ask the question, "After all the claims that this "stigmata" was God's miraculous sign of His presence and power to heal through Lucy, why were her prayers not answered?"

CHARISMATIC DECEPTIONS

Lucy Rael aside, deception is not uncommon in the charismatic movement. There are many who pander to spiritual voyeurism, pulling in large crowds with promises of signs and wonders. I have often watched "healers" prance around the stage for hours, stomping on the devil, working the crowd into a frenzy, and claiming healings. Yet no one was healed.

Does this mean that God doesn't heal today? Of course He does. But His healings are the act of His sovereign will, not given carelessly at the beck and call of hucksters.

What grace these people minister to the unfortunate. What compassion they show. They exhibit no more concern for the weak than for what they can get out of their pocketbooks. The message of the Word-faith camp is give in order to get. And while millions of dollars are poured into their coffers, the leaders beg for more. They are black holes sucking up the lifeblood of those who look with hope to their false promises. And like black holes, they don't allow the light to escape.

Surely God grieves for the poor, the downtrodden, those who are continually robbed of their livings by promises of healing and prosperity if they will be faithful in sending in their hard-earned dollars.

And while Christians are made merchandise of by false teachers, those who expose them are threatened with God's displeasure for "touching God's anointed," or for "judging." Well, brethren, we are to judge error (I Cor. 5:12; Romans 14:13; John 7:24).

And if there was ever a time to judge, this is it!

NOTES

1. Video tape of Good Friday service held at International Gospel Center, Tulsa, 1988.
2. *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Stigmata."
3. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIV (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1912), s.v. "Stigmata."
4. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), s.v. "Stigmatization."
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed., Vol. XXII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), s.v. "Stigmatization."
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Robert J. Fox, *The Call of Heaven: Bro. Gino, Stigmatist* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Publications, Crossroads Books, 1981), p. 110.
12. The Duchess of St. Albans, *Magic of a Mystic: Stories of Padre Pio* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc.), p. 68.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
20. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.
21. "What Mr. Pentecost Thinks About Medjugorje," *New Covenant*, October, 1984, p.
22. Video tape, Good Friday, 1988, service at I.G.C.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Letter from Dr. Craig Rumedly to Ray Gene, 12-18-88.
26. Video tape, Good Friday, 1988, service at I.G.C.
27. *Ibid.*



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