

**Vassula, 'True Life in God'  
and the Vatican**

**by a Catholic Priest**



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## **VASSULA RYDEN, “TRUE LIFE IN GOD” AND THE VATICAN.**

### **Introduction**

To avoid unnecessary distraction, I would like to introduce myself. I am a priest of a Diocese in the United Kingdom. I have been a priest for just over 40 years. I am, at the time of writing, 67 years old. I have been the diocesan exorcist for nearly 17 years and I have been the spiritual director of a “chosen soul” (not Vassula!) for over 30 years. I have held parish appointments since I was ordained in 1975.

The lady I direct has been “accepted” by others, including one of my former bishops and other priests with expertise in such things including one who gained his doctorate in a special study of mysticism. I have been her director since one of my bishops told me to “look after her”. I have learned much about discernment in such cases through experience (and this has not always been easy).

### **Why am I writing this booklet?**

Since I was a boy I have had a keen interest in both truth and justice, and I am particularly concerned to see that lay members of the Church are treated with respect. Although Vassula is not a Catholic, she has been subjected to criticism and judgement from certain individuals in the Roman Catholic episcopate and the priesthood. I hope to show here that some of that criticism is, at least, unfair, and has often seemed unjust. I will do this by presenting facts, including references to problems with Canon Law, and not just opinion. I write with respect to my superiors and confreres, but always with a desire to speak the truth and to defend those who appear to have been unjustly treated.

There are many aspects to Vassula’s case, but I shall be dealing only with the most controversial issues.

### **1. HAS VASSULA BEEN CONDEMNED BY THE VATICAN?**

The short answer is “No”. But this requires some explanation. There has been a “Notification” against Vassula’s writings. This was issued by the Congregation for The Faith in 1995. It was not signed by anyone. Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect, was not in Rome at the time. This Notification clearly suggested that the writings contained some ideas or teachings that contradict Catholic doctrine. The knowledge of Vassula’s writings shown by the Notification was

inadequate. Vassula had not been consulted and there are no extensive quotations from the writings, nor are there any references to consultations with others. When asked if this was a condemnation, Cardinal Ratzinger answered that it is a “warning”. This answer was given as part of an interview with Dr. Niels Christian Hvidt, a lay theologian, in the Italian edition of “30 Days” (30 Giorni. 1. 1999). The Cardinal also assured others in person, or by letter, that they may continue to read the writings. Bishop Terra from Brazil, who was in Rome working with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger at the Pontifical Biblical Commission, is on video speaking about his dialogue with the Cardinal. The Prefect told him to continue as before, but with care. This answer adequately describes the status of the “warning”. Below I quote the relevant part of the interview with Dr. Hvidt. This is taken from the website “Defending Vassula”;

**Niels Christian Hvidt:** This last question could be a little embarrassing. It regards a contemporary prophetic figure - the Greek Orthodox Vassula Ryden. She is considered by many faithful, and by many theologians, priests and bishops of the Catholic Church to be a messenger of Christ. Her messages, which have been translated into 34 languages since 1991, are known throughout the world. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has, however, declared negative on the issue. The 1995 Notification on the obscure points as well as the positive aspects of her writings was interpreted by some commentators as a condemnation. Is that the case?

**RATZINGER:** You have touched on a very problematical issue. **No, the Notification is a warning, not a condemnation.** From the strictly procedural point of view, no person may be condemned without a trial and without being given the opportunity to air their views first. What we say is that there are many things which are not clear. There are some debateable apocalyptic elements and ecclesiological aspects which are not clear. Her writings contain many good things but the grain and the chaff are mixed up. That is why we invited Catholic faithful to view it all with a prudent eye and to measure it by the yardstick of the constant faith of the Church.

**Niels Christian Hvidt:** Is the procedure to clarify the question continuing?

**RATZINGER:** Yes, and during the clarification process the faithful must be prudent, maintaining a discerning attitude. There is no doubt that there is

an evolution in the writings which does not yet seem to have concluded. We must remember that being able to set oneself up as the word and image of interior contact with God, even in the case of authentic mysticism, always depends on the possibilities of the human soul and its limitations. Unlimited trust should only be placed in the real Word of the Revelation that we encounter in the faith transmitted by the Church.

**The Problem of Christian Prophecy**, in *30Giorni*, No 1 - 1999  
Interview with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger by Niels Christian Hvidt

This answer was given before any dialogue took place between Vassula and the CDF. With the Cardinal's approval a dialogue was begun with the help of the theologian, Fr. (now Cardinal) Prospero Grech. The outcome of this dialogue was the response to the CDF described by the Cardinal as "useful clarifications". The Cardinal insisted that Vassula's answers be printed in her books (thus signalling that it is permissible to read her writings). It is clear to many that since her answers were prompted by the Notification, they should be read alongside the Notification. Only in this way can the "faithful... be prudent". It perhaps needs to be stressed that the Cardinal's answer to Dr. Hvidt mentioned the "faithful" and not bishops or priests in isolation. In my view this suggests that some care should be taken in advising members of the laity regarding these writings. Sadly, there have been examples of lay people being treated disrespectfully and even subject to persecution because of their acceptance of Vassula's writings.

At the end of the dialogue, and with the acceptance of her answers, Vassula wanted to know what answer the CDF would give to those who asked advice regarding her writings. Cardinal Ratzinger said that the answer would be, "the position has been modified and.. people should find their answers in the light of the dialogue we have had", i.e. that the Notification should be read in the light of Vassula's answers. Unfortunately, the Cardinal's successor was either unaware of this modification or was persuaded to take another approach by a person or persons unknown.

There was another very significant development which deserves mention. Cardinal Ratzinger personally gave Vassula a letter that she might use when needed. It is a letter he wrote to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of France, Switzerland, Uruguay, Philippines and Canada. The purpose of giving this letter to Vassula was to make the point that there was really no further need to consult the CDF regarding "True Life in God" and Vassula, but that the local bishops should be able to decide for themselves whether or not

to allow TLIG presentations and Prayer Groups in their dioceses. In other words, they should treat "True Life In God" as they would any other spirituality or group. This suggests that the bishops should become informed about these things in order to make a just decision. Simply quoting the Notification without reference to other developments is not acceptable. Below I present the translation of this letter;

CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI

10 July 2004

Prot N. 54/92-19631

Eminence/Excellence,

As you know, this Congregation published a Notification in 1995 on the writings of Mrs. Vassula Rydén. Afterwards, and at her request, a thorough dialogue followed. At the conclusion of this dialogue, a letter of Mrs. Rydén dated 4 April 2002 was subsequently published in the latest volume of "True Life in God", in which Mrs. Rydén supplies useful clarifications regarding her marital situation, as well as some difficulties which in the aforesaid Notification were suggested towards her writings and her participation in the sacraments (cf. Attachment).

Since the aforementioned writings have enjoyed a certain diffusion in your country, this Congregation has deemed it useful to inform you of the above. Concerning the participation in the ecumenical prayer groups organised by Mrs. Rydén, the Catholic faithful should be called to follow the dispositions of the Diocesan Bishops.

In communicating to you the above, I use the occasion to assure you of my lasting and profound esteem.

Yours Eminence's/Excellency's

Most Devout

(Signed)

Joseph Card. Ratzinger  
*Prefect*



The “attachment” was obviously a reference to the details the Cardinal mentioned regarding the Notification and/or Vassula’s answers.

Unfortunately, Cardinal Ratzinger’s successor at the CDF, Cardinal Levada, issued a letter stating that it was inappropriate for Catholics to be members of the “True Life in God” prayer groups. There were basic inaccuracies in this letter, as well as a serious factual error and a statement that is simply untrue. He said that the Notification remains in force and is a “doctrinal judgement” of her writings. This blatantly contradicts the statement of his predecessor and once again flies in the face of Canon Law. When clarification was requested he replied in an extraordinary manner referring to nothing mentioned in the previous letter, offering no explanation and no evidence for his assessment of the prayer groups. His answer was so lacking in any relevant details that it could have been an answer to another query which had nothing to do with the “True Life in God” prayer groups. Clearly there was a major contradiction between the assessments of the two Cardinals, and we have to ask some necessary questions about the status of Cardinal Levada’s letters.

## 2. DOES CARDINAL LEVADA’S LETTER PROHIBIT MEMBERSHIP OF VASSULA’S PRAYER GROUPS?

The quick answer is “No”, but this also requires more explanation. To begin with, according to Canon Law, there could be no prohibition since there had been no proper examination of the Prayer Group material or guidelines, Vassula had not been consulted, nor had any of the priests who had become members of such groups. To attempt to issue any prohibition under these conditions would have been grossly unjust.

**What is the status of Cardinal Levada’s letters?** This can best be answered by reference to some documents prepared and sent to the Apostolic Signatura by Anthony Jeremy, Solicitor and Fellow, Centre for Law and Religion at the University of Cardiff. The two most important documents are a “Petition for Administrative Recourse” sent to His Eminence Cardinal Burke. This petition was signed by Catholic Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops. It was sent to the CDF by Cardinal Daneels on behalf of the Signatura. It requested answers from the CDF regarding its statements about Vassula and her writings. The second document is the “Supplementary Petition for Administrative Recourse”. This was prepared because there had been no response from the CDF regarding the first petition. Anthony Jeremy wrote personally to Cardinal Levada asking for a response. No response was offered.

Anthony Jeremy's documents were meticulously prepared with regard to Roman Catholic Canon Law. In his deposition or introduction to the petition he clearly outlines breaches in Canon Law committed by the CDF. The fact that Cardinal Burke requested an answer from the CDF is surely significant. The CDF did not even reply to him. I have copies of all the relevant documents.

I would also like to refer to a letter written by Fr. Lars Messerschmidt who, at that time, was the Vicar general of Denmark and the main exorcist of his diocese. This letter was written in response to people alarmed at Cardinal Levada's letter. Fr. Lars simply refers to the situation established by the Cardinal's predecessor. In this extract, I have added the name of Cardinal Ratzinger since he is the one referred to in the first sentence;

*"He (Cardinal Ratzinger) mentions in the letter that Vassula, in her answers to the Congregation, printed in the latest volume of "True Life in God" has supplied "useful clarifications regarding her marital situation, as well as some difficulties which in the aforesaid Notification were suggested towards her writings and her participation in the sacraments".*

This statement sounds rather laconic, but on the basis of the 1995 Notification it means that the Congregation is satisfied with her answers and no longer holds on to the dogmatic reservations against her. Understandably, the Congregation abstains from concluding whether she is truly God's instrument, but rather leaves it to the individual bishop, priest or believer to make their own judgement, only, the document says that bishops if necessary should give indications for the ecumenical prayer groups that Vassula organizes.

There are abundant testimonies from different denominations and even from non-Christians indicating that people have come to a real and deep faith in Christ by reading and listening to Vassula. Jesus says that spiritual things are to be judged by their fruits. There can be no doubt that the fruits of Vassula's activities are good, but everyone has to discern, whether she is one of Jesus Christ's instruments today. On the basis of Cardinal Ratzinger's short letter it is now without the shadow of doubt that a Catholic with a clear conscience can consider Vassula as sent from God. Of course, everyone is free not to do so, but it is no longer possible to posit dogmatic grounds to reject her. To judge spiritual things one needs to listen to one's heart. Freedom and respect

for each other's opinions are imperative when dealing with apparitions and prophecies."

Is a Catholic bound in conscience to fully accept a statement from the Prefect of the CDF when there is clear and abundant evidence that the statement contains at least two falsehoods and is in breach of Canon Law? Obviously not. Since repeated attempts have been made to clarify the situation regarding Vassula and the CDF and there has been a consistent refusal to respond to such requests I would be very surprised to hear any bishop or priest demand obedience to such a questionable statement.

What should Cardinal Levada have done? Part of the answer to this can be found in the book, "The Ratzinger Report" from 1985, where Cardinal Ratzinger clearly outlined the procedure to be followed in judging the orthodoxy of a particular spirituality (see pages 68-69 of the book). This is the procedure used in the dialogue with Vassula, but not followed subsequently by Cardinal Levada. There is another aspect already mentioned; that of natural justice. That any Congregation of the Vatican could act in contradiction to this surely points to a very serious failure.

### **SOME FURTHER REMARKS**

As Catholic bishops and priests we have, perhaps, become accustomed now to scandals in the Church. There are other scandals besides those of a sexual nature. Indeed, part of those terrible sexual scandals was the abuse of authority. The treatment of Vassula and others like her, in my opinion, sometimes falls under the heading of the abuse of authority. The fact that such an important part of the Vatican can behave in such a way as to be in contravention of the United Nations charter of Human Rights is surely scandal enough, but the repeated unjust treatment of another Christian, who has been granted no right of reply, is worse. My own conscience is perfectly clear in this matter, and given the evidence that I and others possess, I am not afraid of being challenged. But that is not the point of this booklet. My basic request is simply this; that Vassula and the readers of her writings should be treated with the respect which is, first of all, their right as human beings, and secondly their right as members of the Church.

At this point, as a kind of illustration, I would like to share an experience I had which confirms that **all was not well at the Vatican**. Since I have been defending Vassula online for some years now, I have been subjected to attacks (there is no other word for it) and name-calling as well as false accusations – and some of this often from clergy. A few years ago I had an email from a Dominican priest in Rome who was commiserating with me over a vicious attack I had suffered from a priest (who never gave his real name). This Dominican advised me to “drop” Vassula because there was a “dicastery” working against her and the group of priests concerned were determined to destroy her. In reply I asked this priest if he was acting in disobedience to Pope Benedict. His reply to that was to request that I remove his emails from my computer because he had communicated with me “without permission” (permission from who?). I foolishly did this. Had I kept the emails I might have been able to trace this Dominican priest to confirm that he is a genuine priest, and if so, it would have provided further clear evidence of unjust behaviour relating to Vassula’s case.

I have not spoken of the situation regarding the “Orthodox Church” (more accurately, perhaps, “churches”) but here again there are clear examples of injustice and the breach of Church law. One thing that needs to be stressed in conclusion is that Vassula is a fully participating member of the Greek Orthodox Church under the Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. I can personally testify to this since I was present when the Patriarch formally accepted her as a member of his Church. In spite of what some shrill voices still contend, Vassula has NOT been excommunicated by the Greek Orthodox Church. In this case, as in the Catholic case, there has been a lack of observance of Church Law. Vassula has not been summoned to any hearing regarding her standing in the Orthodox Church and has received no formal document bearing the Patriarch’s seal stating that she has been excommunicated. Such things are required for any formal procedure of this kind.

## THEOLOGIANS, MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AND BOOKS

A book has been published carrying almost all the messages of "True Life in God" (Vassula's writings). It has been granted a *Nihil Obstat* by Bishop Felix Toppo, S.J., D.D., Bishop of Jamshedpur, and an *Imprimatur* by Archbishop Ramon C. Argüelles, D.D., S.T.L., the Archbishop of Lipa. Vassula's writings have received the approval of Mgr. Réne Laurentin, the late Fr. Michael O'Caroll, Fr. Edward O'Connor C.S.C. and other theologians. A superb defence of Vassula was presented by the Polish seminary professor, Fr. Michael Kaszowski. This paper deals with supposed Trinitarian confusion in the messages. Fr. Mitch Pacwa S.J. wrote a well-circulated article against Vassula, but this has been adequately addressed by Fr. Kaszowski's article as well as by Sr. Anne Woods, a hermit who has spent much of her life studying mystical theology, who wrote a point by point rebuttal of Fr. Pacwa's arguments. Fr. Pacwa has never answered Sr. Anne although she took pains to send him her article. I would also like to mention an article by the theologian Fr. Joseph L. Iannuzzi, S.T.D. which can be found at, <http://www.tlig.org/en/news/2016-03-11/2344/>

Cardinal Prospero Grech recently reviewed Vassula's book, "Heaven is real, but so is Hell" (a kind of autobiography) in the magazine, *Inside the Vatican* (January 2014). In his review he said that if this book had been available earlier Vassula may not have had such trouble with the Vatican.

More information about the attacks on Vassula and how they have been answered can be found on the website *Defending Vassula*, at <http://www.defending-vassula.org> and more information, as well as the writings themselves, can be found at [www.tlig.org](http://www.tlig.org).

Sr. Anne Woods recently wrote a comprehensive overview of the spirituality of 'True Life in God'. Titled "An Invitation to be One with Christ - a Modern Prophecy in the Light of Jewish and Christian Biblical Symbolism" (available through tlig.org) in which, with her knowledge of Hebrew theology, she successfully shows that even the way in which Vassula wrote the messages is consistent with features of Hebrew literature (something which Vassula could not have known at the beginning).

I have spoken with Sister Anne many times, and she has often remarked that many of Vassula's critics seem to have a poor understanding of mystical theology.

## FINAL REMARKS

In writing this booklet, it was not my intention to cause any harm to the reputation of the Vatican or any individual members of the Roman Catholic Church, but I believe I should be as honest as I can in presenting the situation of Vassula Rydén in relation to the Vatican and certain sections of the Catholic Church. I do not believe it is right to hide what looks like injustice, and if no injustice was intended by anyone criticising Vassula, we must recognise, for the sake of justice, what seems to be the case. In my view, as a priest with 40 years' pastoral experience, we cannot afford to show the Catholic Church in a bad light. Mistakes that are not rectified damage our mission. Where apologies are needed they should be offered and where corrections of procedure are needed, they should be made.

In conclusion, I simply appeal that Vassula and anyone who is subject to any kind of investigation within the Catholic Church, and in particular by any office of the Vatican, should be treated with the respect which is their right, and that in our dealings with other members of the Church, or with people outside the Catholic Church, the clergy especially should strive to be kind and just. As I finish this booklet I am aware of a recent address of Pope Francis to the Italian bishops in which he told them to strongly denounce corruption and to act more like pastors than "pilots" telling the faithful what to do. He has said similar things to priests. We are truly called to be servants, and as shepherds we should treat the sheep with kindness and respect.

Fr. John Abberton, B.A.

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