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## **Present Ecclesial Status of Devotion to St. Philomena**

**Dr. Mark I. Miravalle**

Precisely how the Church views the history and nature of devotion attributed to an early Roman martyr named “Filumena” (or more popularly, “Filomena”[Ital.] or “Philomena” [Eng.]), a name found inscribed on a catacomb *loculus*, remains a topic of considerable discussion and confusion.

The status of devotion to St. Philomena has recently received renewed attention in light of the recent release of the revised *Roman Martyrology* by the Congregation for Divine Worship,<sup>1</sup> whereby the omission of St. Philomena was perceived by some as an official rejection of her status as a saint, somewhat inconsistent with the fact that she continues to be the object of popular Church devotion throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>

What then is the present ecclesial status of this early Church female martyr, the veneration of whom in the past has been the object of several papal documents and numerous hagiographical testimonies? In seeking to examine this question, we will briefly examine the historical origins of devotion; papal and ecclesiastical decrees regarding the devotion; hagiographical testimonies; the archeological controversy; and recent Church documents relative to the devotion.

### **Historical Origins of the Devotion**

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<sup>1</sup> *Roman Martyrology*, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, October 2, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example, the universal Archconfraternity granted to St. Philomena by St. Pius X, Apostolic Brief *Pias Fidelium* (May 21, 1912), *AAS* 4, 1912, p. 398.

On May 24, 1802, an excavator in the Catacombs of Priscilla struck a tile and, as previously instructed by Msgr. Ponzetti, Custodian of the Holy Relics, immediately ceased the excavation.<sup>3</sup> Fr. Filippo Ludovici, Vatican overseer of the excavation was informed, and on the following day, May 25, 1802, Fr. Ludovici, accompanied by several observers, descended into the catacomb, and witnessed the full uncovering of the *loculus*,<sup>4</sup> whereby with the removal of soil, three brick funeral tiles were revealed which bore an epitaph painted in red. A vial was found broken in the process of unsealing the *loculus*, with a dust of blackish color indicating blood clinging to glass fragments, and with the lower portion of the vial still intact and firmly embedded in the cement.<sup>5</sup> An engraved palm branch, the other typical sign which designates the tomb of a martyr along with the blood vial, was observed on the second tile.<sup>6</sup>

The painted inscription on the three funeral tiles appeared as follows: tile one - LUMENA; tile two – PAXTE; tile three – CUM FI.<sup>7</sup> The *loculus* was documented by Msgr. Ponzetti, Custodian of the Holy Relics, as bearing “FILUMENA,” an interpretation of the epitaph consistent with both the ancient custom of beginning inscriptions from the second tile and the logical etymological context. The result is a full reading of the epitaph as “PAX TECUM FILUMENA.”<sup>8</sup>

The name of “Filumena” is officially granted to the sacred remains examined on May 25, 1802, as recorded in the document issued by Ponzetti as Custodian of the Sacred Relics which released the remains of this Christian martyr to the Diocese of Nola on June 8, 1805:

8 Iunii 1805

Dono dedi Ven. Ecclesiae Archipresbyterali terrae Mugnano Dioecesis  
Nolanae corpus Sanctae Christi Martyris

FILUMENAE

Nominis proprii sic picti in tribus Tabulis laterariis cinabro

LUMENA PAXTE CUM FI

in pulverem et in fragmina redactum per me infrascriptum Custodem  
extractum cum vasculo vitreo fracto ex Coemeterio Priscillae Via Salaria  
Nova die 25 maii 1802, quod collocavi in capsula lignea charta colorata  
cooperta et consignavi Illmo Dominico Caesari pro Illmo et Rmo D.  
Bartholomaeo de Caesare Epo Potentino.

HYACINTHUS PONZETTI, *Custos*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Fr. Francisco de Lucia, *Relazione storica della traslazione del corpo di santa Filomena, vergine e martire, da Roma a Mugnano del Cardinale*, Naples, 1824, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>Graves hewn out of rock commonly found in the catacombs.

<sup>5</sup>De Lucia, *Relazione*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Msgr. Hyacinth Ponzetti, *Archivi della Lipsanoteca di Roma*, Registro II, June 8, 1805, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup>Ponzetti, *Archivi*, p. 271.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Fr. Francesco de Lucia, priest from the Church of Our Lady of Grace at Mugnano del Cardinale in the Diocese of Nola, received the assistance of Msgr. Bartolomeo de Cesare, Bishop-elect of Nola in obtaining permission from the Holy See to transfer the sacred remains of the Christian martyr, Filumena to his Mugnano parish for the purpose of fostering spiritual renewal amidst his faithful. The remains of Filumena departed from Rome on July 1, 1805 and arrived at Mugnano on August 10, 1805 where they have remained since the transferal.<sup>10</sup>

The exceptional quantity of miracles which resulted from the petitioning of the martyr invoked as “Philomena,” initially by the southern Italian faithful, and then shortly thereafter by peoples of various countries, has been officially documented in various ecclesiastical recordings. Both the extensive documentation from the St. Philomena Shrine at Our Lady of Grace Church in Mugnano,<sup>11</sup> and the documentation for the beatification and canonization processes of John Vianney at Ars, record the remarkable quantity of miracles attributed to the intercession of St. Philomena, which included the miraculous cure of Vianney himself.<sup>12</sup>

In 1833, Bishop Anselmo Basilici of the Diocese of Nepi and Sutri requested a feast and office in honor of St. Philomena from the Holy See, with the local ordinary from Nola having prepared a lesson for the breviary in her honor.<sup>13</sup> The Basilici petition received the support of a significant number of Italian bishops, in spite of its unusual status due to the absence of reference to St. Philomena in any martyrology or in any other historical account. The *loculus* name, Filumena, and the ubiquitous miracles acquired through her intercession as testified by numerous Church authorities sufficed for many of the Italian hierarchy in substantiating the legitimacy of the petition.<sup>14</sup> On September 6, 1834, the Congregation of Rites submitted to Pope Gregory XVI the formal request for the approval of the office and mass in honor of St. Philomena, virgin and martyr, due to the repeated request for this liturgical cult and veneration by several prelates.<sup>15</sup>

On June 17, 1835, the Congregation of Rites also concluded positively to a documented miracle submitted by Bishop Basilici and other bishops and priests, which testified to a multiplication of bone dust derived from the sacred remains.<sup>16</sup> In the dossier submitted to the Congregation, several bishops and clergy testified to the inexplicable multiplication of bone dust originating from a few grams (“one pinch”), which then provided bone dust for hundreds of reliquaries without the original amount experiencing any decrease in quantity. Other experiments were conducted with numerous Church and civil witnesses, only to observe and testify to the same phenomenon of multiplication.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> De Lucia, *Relazione*, 53ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Documentation from the Parish Shrine of Mugnano, commencing with de Lucia, *Relazione*, Vol. I, p. 1, and continuing with the pastor of Our Lady of Grace Church Rector, Msgr. Gennaro Ippolito, *Memorie e culto di santo Filomena Vergine e martire*, Mormile, Naples, 1870, Ch. 25; also pp. 23-24, 256, 277, 42-48; cf. also Archives of the Parish of Ars and ecclesiastical records relative to the Process of Beatification and Canonization of John Vianney and attribution of miracles to St. Philomena, Process of the Ordinary and Apostolic Processes, e.g., *Procès de l'Ordinaire*, Aug. 12, 1864, pp. 1325, 334, 179, 751, 1160, 1460, *Procès apostolique ne pereant*, October 10, 1876, p. 288, 768.

<sup>12</sup> *Procès de l'Ordinaire*, II, p. 1447; *Procès apostolique*, p. 1215-1216.

<sup>13</sup> Ippolito, *Memorie*, Vol. I, pt. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Cf. also, Msgr. Francois Trochu, *Sainte Philomène, Vierge et Martyre, La “petite Sainte” du Curé d’Ars*, Librairie Catholique Emmanuel Vitte, Lyon-Paris, 1924, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, September 6, 1834.

<sup>16</sup> Presentation of the dossier of Bishop Basilici to the Sacred Congregation of Rites, June 17, 1835, presided over by Cardinal Galiffi, vice-Prefect of the Congregation.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., cf. also Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 122.

The documented cure of Ven. Pauline Jaricot, foundress of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which occurred at the Mugnano tomb of Philomena, took place with proximate involvement and knowledge of Pope Gregory XVI.<sup>18</sup> The pontiff met with Jaricot in Rome while she was gravely ill with heart disease and heard directly from Jaricot of her intention to travel to Mugnano, for the specific purpose of petitioning the martyr Philomena for a cure so as to serve as a supernatural manifestation of God's desire to have the martyr raised to the liturgical veneration of the altar. The documented cure took place on August 10, 1835, with a complete and instantaneous healing of Jaricot with regard to her heart and overall health.<sup>19</sup> Jaricot immediately returned to Rome, during which Pope Gregory observed her for a year to verify the perdurance of the miraculous healing. This miracle constituted the final impetus for the Pontiff to sanction the raising of popular devotion of the martyr to the status of public liturgical veneration in this manifestation of ecclesiastically approved sanctity.<sup>20</sup>

On January 30, 1837, Gregory XVI issued a solemn pontifical decree confirming the rescript of the Congregation of Rites authorizing her public cultus and approving the office, Mass of the Common of a virgin and martyr with a proper fourth lesson at Matins in honor of St. Philomena, virgin and martyr on August 11.<sup>21</sup> This papal approval of public liturgical devotion was first granted to the clergy of the Diocese of Nola, and later extended to other dioceses, including Rome itself.<sup>22</sup> The fourth lesson officially inserted into the Breviary in liturgical honor of St. Philomena on August 11 acknowledges the finding of her remains in the Priscilla catacombs, her martyrdom status, the rapid spread of her extensive popular devotion amidst the faithful due to her miraculous intercession, and the permission of Gregory XVI to celebrate liturgically the office and mass in her honor (as here presented):

DIE XI AUGUSTI

IN FESTO S. PHILUMENAE

*Virginis et Martyris*

In II NOCTURNO – LECTIO IV

Inter cetera martyrum sepulcra, quae in coemeterio Priscillae ad viam Salarium reperiri solent, illud exstitit quo repositum fuerat sanctae Philumenaе corpus, uti ex tumuli inscriptione, tribus laterculis apposita, perlegebatur. Licet vero inventa fuerit phiala sanguinis, et alia descripta conspicerentur martyrii insignia, dolendum tamen est res ab eadem gestas actaque ac genus martyrii quod ipsa fecit obscura perstitisse. Ceterum ubi primum sacrum hoc corpus, ex beneficentia Pii septimi initio pontificatus ejus acceptum, cultui fidelis populi propositum fuit Mugnani in Nolana

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<sup>18</sup> Ippolito, *Memorie*, pp. 243, 55; cf. also Msgr. Deschamps du Manoir, *Mugnano et sainte Philomène*, p. 40; M. J. Maurin, *Vie nouvelle de P. M. Jaricot*, Librairie du Sacré-Cœur, Lyon.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>21</sup> Solemn Decree of Gregory XVI (January 30, 1837), in Papal Approval of the Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (September 6, 1834); cf. Ippolito, *Memorie*, p.122-123; Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 129.

<sup>22</sup> Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (January 15, 1857); Cf. Atwater, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Allen, TX, Thomas More, p. 300.

dioecesi, ingens illico famae celebritas ac religio erga sanctam martyrem percrebuit, praesertim ob signa quae ejusdem praesidio accessisse undique ferebatur. Hinc factum est ut complurium antistitum cultorumque martyris postulationibus permotus Gregorius decimus sextus pontifex maximus, universa rei ratione mature perpensa, festum ejusdem cum Officio et Missa in memorata Nolana dioecesi et alibi agendum benigne permiserit.

C.M. Episcop. Praenest. Card. PEDICINIUS;  
S. R. E. Vice- C. S.R.C. Praef. ;  
V. PESCELLI S. Fidei Promotor.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, Pope Gregory XVI in a papal decree, granted official approbation of the liturgical cultus and, thereby, official ecclesiastical recognition of the sanctity of St. Philomena, virgin and martyr. The Pontiff, fully aware of the absence of any historical account of the martyr saint “Filumena,” granted to her the privileges of public liturgical veneration based upon the foundation of the great quantity of miracles ecclesiastically documented and recognized as having occurred through her direct intercession.

The official positive decree of Gregory XVI in papal recognition of St. Philomena’s status as deserving of liturgical cult reinforces the deeper truth that far more important than the historical account of Philomena’s earthly life is the historical and documented account of her powerful intercession for the Church as sanctioned by God himself. Whoever this early Christian martyr is and whatever constitutes the particular circumstances of her life and death, God is pleased with prayers of petition offered in the name of “St. Philomena,” to which He has responded generously to the Christian faithful in granting an abundance of heavenly favors.

The historical abundance of miracles attests to God’s desire to encourage devotion to the person behind the name of Filumena, regardless of the absence of a recorded history of her earthly life. This primacy of importance of her actual intercession for the People of God in our own times, over the details of her earthly life in ancient times, is what the Pope and the Church confirmed in the raising of St. Philomena to the level of public liturgical veneration, the beginning of the process of her public recognition as saint and martyr.

### **Magisterial Decrees pertaining to Devotion to St. Philomena**

From the liturgical approval of Gregory XVI to the papal decrees of St. Pius X, Nineteen acts of the Holy See in the course of five successive pontificates were issued in positive promotion of popular devotion to St. Philomena expressed in the form of elevations in rank of liturgical cultus, the erection of confraternities and archconfraternities, and the granting of plenary and partial indulgences.<sup>24</sup>

Several acts of the Holy See particularly display the Magisterium’s approval and encouragement of ecclesial devotion to this Christian saint and martyr. Beyond the

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<sup>23</sup> Approved in the Rescript from the Sacred Congregation of Rites (January 30, 1837); cf. also Trochu, *op. cit.*, p. 318-319.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. for example: Leo XII, Decree of Sacred Congregation of Rites (March 15, 1826); Gregory XVI, Sacred Congregation of Rites (Sept. 6, 1834; Jan. 30, 1837; March 16, 1839); Bl. Pius IX (Jan. 11, 1855; Jan. 15, 1857; March 18, 1859), Pont. Brief (Dec. 9, 1859); Leo XIII, Pont. Brief (Dec. 15, 1883), (Sept. 24, 1889); *Pias Fidelium*; cf. also Ippolito, *Memorie*, pp. 113-117; 165-167.

elevation of the rank of the mass and office previously granted by Gregory XVI,<sup>25</sup> Bl. Pius IX approved a proper mass and office dedicated to St. Philomena with the papal confirmation of the previously submitted decree, *Etsi decimo* on January 31, 1855,<sup>26</sup> a significant liturgical elevation, even though her name was never entered into the *Roman Martyrology*. The granting of a proper mass and office to St. Philomena, which took place following the return of Bl. Pius IX from a papal pilgrimage to Mugnano during his forced exile from Rome,<sup>27</sup> was an unprecedented act in honor of a Christian martyr known only by name and evidence of martyrdom. Bl. Pius IX also granted plenary and partial indulgences to devotions in honor of St. Philomena at the Sanctuary in Mugnano.<sup>28</sup>

Pope Leo XIII granted papal approbation to the Cord of St. Philomena with several plenary indulgences in association with its wearing,<sup>29</sup> and accorded the title and privilege of “archconfraternity” for the respective Philomenian devotion and work in France.<sup>30</sup> Pope St. Pius X continued the papal succession of encouragement for public Church devotion by approving the extension of the Archconfraternity of St. Philomena to the universal Church.<sup>31</sup>

Far more than one solitary papal act by Gregory XVI, the papal Magisterium has repeatedly encouraged the nature and growth of ecclesial devotion to St. Philomena, in official recognition of her status as a saint, in public liturgical and devotional sanctions which extended to the *universal faith and life of the Church*, and thereby manifesting official and essential liturgical and devotional characteristics of her status as a saint as defined by the Church.

## Hagiographical Testimony

St. John Vianney, beyond any other saint or blessed, manifested an expansive testimony of faith and documented witness toward the reality of St. Philomena and her profound intercessory efficacy.<sup>32</sup> The Curé, as recorded in the canonization process, attributed all the miracles documented at Ars to have been effected through St. Philomena’s intercession;<sup>33</sup> repeatedly spoke of having received apparitions of St. Philomena;<sup>34</sup> and directly attributed his own personal miraculous cure from grave illness to her intercession.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Decree of Sacred Congregation of Rites (March 16, 1839; Jan. 1, 1841).

<sup>26</sup> Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, Papal Confirmation of Promotor of the Faith Brief *Etsi decimo* as submitted by Rev. Andrea Fratini (January 31, 1855).

<sup>27</sup> On November 7, 1849, Bl. Pius IX pilgrimaged to Mugnano escorted by Ferdinand II, the King of Naples, in public petition to St. Philomena for his safe return to the Vatican, cf. Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 134; Ippolito, *Memorie*, p. 116.

<sup>28</sup> Sacred Congregation of Indulgences, Pont. Brief (July 3, 1863).

<sup>29</sup> Leo XIII, Papal Approbation of Cord of St. Philomena and Indulgences (December 15, 1883).

<sup>30</sup> Leo XIII, Papal Approbation of the Archconfraternity of St. Philomena for France (Sept. 24, 1889).

<sup>31</sup> *Pias Fidelium*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Archives of the Parish of Ars and ecclesiastical records relative to the Process of Beatification and Canonization of John Vianney and attribution of miracles to St. Philomena, Process of the Ordinary and Apostolic Processes, e.g., *Procès de l’Ordinaire*, pp. 334, 179, 751, 1160, 1325, 1460, 1447; *Procès apostolique*, pp. 288, 768, 1215-1216; Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup> *Procès de l’Ordinaire*, II, p. 1426; 1374.

<sup>34</sup> *Procès de l’Ordinaire*, p. 253-254; *Procès apostolique*, p. 234.

<sup>35</sup> *Procès de l’Ordinaire*, II, p. 1447; *Procès apostolique*, pp. 1215-1216.

The testimony and cure of Ven. Pauline Jaricot through the intercession of the young martyr saint has been noted.<sup>36</sup> St. Peter Julian Eymard was cured from serious illness after having been instructed by Vianney to pray a novena to St. Philomena.<sup>37</sup> St. Peter Chanel, the first Oceanian martyr, preached of St. Philomena and referred to her as his “auxiliary” in his missionary apostolate.<sup>38</sup> Bl. Damien de Veuster dedicated his first chapel in Molokai to the young saint.<sup>39</sup> Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat consistently invoked Philomena during difficulties in the establishment of her societies, and attributed the miraculous cure of a dying novice to her intercession.<sup>40</sup>

Bl. Anna Maria Taigi, as related in her beatification proceedings, applied oil burned before the tomb of St. Philomena to the eye of her grandchild who had been medically diagnosed with an incurable pupil tear of the eye, and the eye was immediately healed.<sup>41</sup> Other saints and blessed who manifested veneration to St. Philomena include St. Magdalene of Canossa, Bl. Bartolo Longo, Bl. Annibale Da Messina, and Bl. Pius IX, who, shortly before his death, sent to Mugnano the chalice presented to him by the Belgian Federation of Catholic Circles on his golden Episcopal anniversary as one of several papal votive gifts sent in honor of and gratitude to St. Philomena.<sup>42</sup>

The wisdom inherent in sanctity as personified in the lives of the aforementioned saints and blessed provides a substantial confirmation of the decrees of the ordinary Magisterium which granted public ecclesiastical devotion to the martyr saint. Worthy of particular mention is the significant number of saints and blessed who immediately participated in veneration of Philomena within the same half century of the discovery of her sacred remains, some before any certain statement concerning her public veneration was issued by Rome.<sup>43</sup>

Note also the predominant importance of the supernatural intervention of miracles in the Church process of canonization. Without the documented miracles, an individual cause does not typically advance past the status of “Servant of God,” even with extensive historical evidence of an earthly life of heroic virtue. The Church places its greatest emphasis for canonization, along with an essential historical basis, upon God’s witness to the sanctity of the candidate through the manifestation of miraculous intercession by the person. It was therefore most appropriate for Gregory XVI to give far greater importance to the miracles documented to the intercession of Philomena, rather than to the history of her earthly existence beyond the Church approved criteria of historically establishing her martyrdom. The present inquiry into the case of St. Philomena should follow the same criteria as those followed by Popes Gregory XVI, Bl. Pius IX, Leo XIII and St. Pius X.

## **Archeological Controversy**

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<sup>36</sup> Ippolito, *Memorie*, pp. 243, 55; cf. also du Manoir, *Mugnano et sainte Philomène*, p. 40; Maurin, *Vie nouvelle*.

<sup>37</sup> *Le Serviteur de Dieu, Pierre-Julien Eymard*, Vatican, 1903, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 216

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>40</sup> Geoffroy de Grandmaison, *La bienheureuse Mère Barat*, Gabalda, 1909, p. 198.

<sup>41</sup> Fr. Gabriel Bouffier, S.J., *La Vénérable Servante de Dieu, Anna-Maria Taigi*, Paris, pp. 125-126.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ippolito, *Memorie*, p. 116; Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> For example, St. John Vianney, Ven. Pauline Jaricot, and Bl. Anna Maria Taigi

Archeologist Oracio Marucchi introduced controversy into the status of devotion to St. Philomena with a 1906 publication, “*Osservazioni archeologiche sulla Iscrizione di S. Filomena*”<sup>44</sup> in which Marucchi put forth the following theory:

1. Concerning the unusual word order on the three tiles, “LUMENA PAXTE CUMFI” the three tiles were purposely re-arranged on the *loculus* to indicate that this was a case of a re-using of the original tiles for the remains of a different person.
2. The tiles were originally used to close in the remains of one called “Filumena,” from the middle to the end of the second century, and later used again for the *loculus* of another young maiden during the fourth century, which was a time of peace for Christianity.
3. The person designated by the inscription was likely, but not certainly, a martyr.<sup>45</sup>

The theory of Marucchi was immediately responded to by a professor of the Gregoriana, Guiseppe Bonavenia, S.J., (along with Catacomb scientist J. B. De Rossi, a renowned expert in early Christian archeology)<sup>46</sup> in his *Controversia sul celeberrimo epitaffio di Santa Filomena, V. e M.*<sup>47</sup> Fr. Bonavenia and others offered the following refutation of Marucchi’s theory:

1. It was frequently the custom in the catacombs to start the epitaph on the second tile, and hence the inscription is properly read (as it was by Msgr. Ponzetti, Custodian of the Sacred Relics), “PAX TECUM FILUMENA” (“Peace to you, Philomena”).
2. The tomb digger, not able to write the entire name on the first tile and to conserve the proportions of his writing, proceeded to write the “FI” on the last tile and the “LUMENA” on the first.
3. At least 12 catacombs located in the Priscilla catacombs begin with “PAX TECUM”, “PAX TIBI” or IN PACE.”
4. The tiles are at least of the third century, and not from the first or second centuries (which would include the persecution of Diocletian) and thus not from a time of peace.
5. There is only one known case posed by Marucchi as similar to Filumena’s, where two tiles were placed in the wrong order due to the re-using of marble (not brick) tiles from different original graves, but the circumstances were substantially different. In the case of “Noeti,” the two tablets are from two different original slabs of marble; the handwriting is not the same on the two slabs but clearly written by two different persons; and the red inscribing is of different hue on each slab. In Filumena’s case, the three tiles all possess the same handwriting, the same color, and the same brick material, all of which

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<sup>44</sup> As found in *Miscellanea di Storia Ecclesiastica*, Vol. 2, 1904, pp. 365-386; and thematically continued in *Nuovo Bullettino di arch. Crist.*, Vol. 12, 1906, pp. 253-300.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> J.B. De Rossi, *Inscriptiones christianae*, Rome.

<sup>47</sup> Bonavenia, S.J., *Controversia sul celeberrimo epitaffio di Santa Filomena V. e M.*, Roma, Filiziani, (1906); and continued in *La questione puramente archeologica* (1907); cf. also the refutation of Marucchi’s theory by Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 256 ff.

give no indications of being re-used and thereby not a valid comparison with the re-use evident in the Noeti *loculus*.

6. In response to the claim of tile re-use from another grave, it would have been just as easy for the mason to use the other side of the tile, as there was nothing written on it, or to erase the “FI” or to simply turn it upside or to leave it in an incoherent form rather than re-use two other tiles. But, in fact, the meaning of the inscription remained essentially clear even with the tile order changed, as it was instantly and correctly understood by the custodians of the Holy Relics to signify “PAX TECUM FILUMENA.”<sup>48</sup>
7. The conclusions of Prof. Marucchi regarding the dating and re-use of the tiles were made without Marucchi making a single on-site scientific or archeological examination of either tiles or catacomb site. Examination of the archeological site and the tiles would have revealed the claim of tile dating and re-use in the case of Filumena to be erroneous and without any empirical foundation.<sup>49</sup>

Another theory for the tile order was put forth by Trochu, and described in the following scenario:

A young martyr is being buried. The *loculus* has been carved in the usual manner, a little higher at the head side than at the feet. The mason chooses two tiles he thinks will be sufficient to seal the tomb. He breaks the larger one into two smaller pieces. Now he has three tiles. He lays them down and writes the inscription. This having been completed, he starts the work of putting the tiles in place. At this point he realizes that because of the difference in height from one side of the tomb to the other, the last tile on which he had written “LUMENA” is not tall enough to seal the grave. To close a 3 centimeter gap along a length of 57 centimeters would be very difficult. Certainly it would be an unappealing idea to rewrite the whole inscription. His solution, therefore, is to change the order of the tiles so that the largest tile, with “CUM FI” inscribed on it, is placed at the head to cover the largest opening (at the far right) and the most important tile, the tile with “PAX TE” written on it, is placed in the middle.<sup>50</sup>

The plausibility of this scenario is manifest, according to Bonavenia, when the tiles, now at Mugnano, are examined. The two tiles that are supposed to have been split fit each other perfectly. There is no doubt they originally formed one large tile. None of the tiles on Filumena’s grave show any of the usual damage or mismatching (as in the Noeti case) that is normal for tiles that have been reused, signs that Marruchi himself said are always present in cases of tile reuse. Moreover, Bonavenia further concludes that the idea posited by Marruchi, that “FILUMENA” was cut in two and the tile “PAX TE” put in the middle, is untenable.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 286, fn. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. also the summation of several archeological contributions which offer refutations of the Marucchi theory in Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, pp. 255-315.

<sup>50</sup> Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, pp. 283-284.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 285.

A moral argument in favor of the authenticity of the tomb of St. Philomena, was offered in an earlier work by H. Leclercq.<sup>52</sup> He argued that the catacombs under Rome are very large, in keeping with the Christian conception of immortality. They had an extreme reverence for each and every Christian body, whether a martyr or not. It was because of their hope for future glory that each body was treated as special, given its own burial spot and why it was forbidden for Christians to open a tomb, either to put one body on top of another, or to disturb a grave in any way. Now, if we were to accept the Marruchi hypothesis, then one would have to accept: a) an epitaph from a first century Christian named Philomena was used for another anonymous Christian's grave in the fourth century; b) that the first person was therefore removed from her grave and c) that this person was removed despite there being room in the lower parts of the catacombs for new bodies. Why would Christians commit these acts that had been forbidden as sacrilegious and against all tradition and belief? Morally, they would not.<sup>53</sup>

More recent archeological study has provided additional clarity regarding the shortcomings of the Marucchi theory. Jesuit archeologist Fr. Antonio Ferrua, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology and Professor of Archeology at the Gregorian University conducted an examination of the tiles and catacomb site in 1963 and issued the following conclusion:

The hypothesis of Marucchi, that three tiles with their inscription came from another tomb and were sealed into the second with the inscription out of order is not sustainable to illustrate that the epitaph does not apply to her:

1. Because in that case one would be able to observe on them some traces of the second application of lime (examiners up to this point have all concluded to only one sealing).
2. During the process of going from first to second usage, chips would have been very likely made to the edges of the brick tile. Two, in particular, come from one complete bipedal<sup>54</sup> which has been split in two. They continue to have sound and undamaged matching edges along the side of the fracture.
3. Marble slabs are often re-used (being valuable material), but not pieces of brick, particularly if already written upon. In any case, where it was desired to avoid the danger of error, the precaution would have been taken of turning the written face inwards (as usually happens when re-using wooden planks). In this way, the inconvenience of having to put new over old would also be eliminated.
4. Finally, it would be rather unusual and surprising that all three re-used bricks came from one and the same (previous) grave.

In conclusion, the hypothesis put forth by Marucchi is of an abstract orientation, improbable, and contrary to the ordinary method of procedure

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<sup>52</sup> *Manuel d'archéologie chrétienne*, Paris, Letouzey, 1907, t. I, p. 220; N.B. This moral argument continues to possess its own merit, despite the author's eventual change in position.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Roman brick tiles approximately two feet in length.

of the grave diggers of ancient times. From this examination, solidly founded on facts, the [Marucchi] hypothesis cannot be accepted as true.<sup>55</sup>

During the time when the “Philomena controversy” arose at the beginning of the twentieth century, Fr. Louis Petit, Director of the “Work of St. Philomena” in France was received by St. Pius X in papal audience on June 6, 1907, during which St. Pius X reportedly commented on the controversy. While Petit’s recorded account of the pontiff’s oral comments cannot be officially verified, the reported statement nonetheless offers valid theological observations:

I am very saddened by all that is being written about her. How can such things be possible?...How can they not see that the great argument in favor of devotion to St. Philomena is the Curé of Ars? Through her, in her name, by means of her intercession, he obtained countless graces, continual wonders. His devotion to her was well known by everyone; he recommended her constantly...

We read the name, Filumena, on her tomb. Whether it be her own name or whether she has another, what does it matter? It remains, it is certain, that the soul which animated those sacred remains was a pure and holy soul that the Church has declared to be the soul of a virgin and martyr. That soul was so beloved by God, so pleasing to the Holy Spirit, that she has obtained the most wonderful graces for those who have had recourse to her intercession.<sup>56</sup>

Apart from archeological differences of opinion, the classic ecclesial criterion for identifying Christian martyrdom, the vial of blood and the palm branch inscription, are historically documented to be found at the *loculus* of Filumena.<sup>57</sup> The future Benedict XIV quotes Pope Clement IX in a decree of April 10, 1668 in confirmation that the blood vial and the palm image truly constitute the findings of a martyr: “Censuit Sacra Congregatio, re diligentius examinata, palmam et vas illorum (martyrum) tinctum pro signis certissimis habenda esse.”<sup>58</sup> The December 10, 1863 Decree of the Congregation of Rites under Bl. Pius IX further confirmed the statement of Clement IX: “Philiis vitreas aut figulinas sanguine tinctas, quae ad *loculus* sepulcorum in sanctis coemeteriis vel intus vel extra ipsos reperiuntur, censeri debere martyrii signum.”<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, the identification of Filumena by the Holy See’s Custodian of Relics as a Christian martyr is, by explicit Church criteria, true and accurate. The further theological rationale contained in the reported comments of St. Pius X are worthy of summation: 1. the witness of St. John Vianney makes clear the modern historical reality of St. Philomena and the exceptional spiritual efficacy of devotion to her; 2. whether Filumena is her accurate name or not is secondary to the fact that the person of these

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<sup>55</sup> Fr. Ferrua, S.J., *Archeological Study of the Bipedals of St. Philomena*, Rome, November 29, 1963, Archives of Mugnano Sanctuary. For more recent archeological studies countering the Marucchi theory, cf. Prandi, Mustilli, and Guarducci, *Graffiti di S. Pietro*, I, p. 501; George Mauter Markhof, *Das unbequeme Wunder, kirchenstreit um Philomena*, Vienna, 1981.

<sup>56</sup> Rev. Louis Petit, *Messenger de sainte Philomène*, July 1907, pp. 356-363; Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>57</sup> Ponzetti, *Archivi*, R. II, p. 271.

<sup>58</sup> Benedict XIV, *De beatif.*, lib. IV, pars II, 27.

<sup>59</sup> Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (Dec. 10, 1863).

sacred remains was a person declared by the Church as a virgin and martyr; 3. this person was so beloved by God that she has been granted the ability to intercede for extraordinary graces for those who invoke her intercession.

Properly understood, these theological and historical facts should place the questionable and secondary archeological objections in a properly subordinate position.

### **Recent Church documents**

In a surprising act which ran contrary to the historical succession of papal magisterial encouragement of public liturgical veneration for the martyr saint, the Congregation of Rites issued a 1961 instruction removing St. Philomena from liturgical calendars.<sup>60</sup> The instruction was issued without rationale for the liturgical action, but common theological opinion concluded to the lack of historicity concerning St. Philomena's origins, coupled with doubts prompted by the archeological controversy initiated by Marucchi.<sup>61</sup>

It is important to note that the 1961 instruction was a liturgical directive and not an ecclesial declaration that St. Philomena was no longer a saint; nor did it prohibit popular devotion to St. Philomena, which has received repeated approbation by the papal Magisterium. The liturgical directive was not accompanied with any suspension or prohibition of the universal status of the Archconfraternity of St. Philomena granted by St. Pius X. Public devotion to St. Philomena continued with the full approval of the Holy See and of the Ordinary of the Diocese of Nola where the Mugnano Sanctuary is located and continues to function, as well as other devotional centers throughout the world.

Popular devotion to St. Philomena continued in the Church after the 1961 instruction, resting upon the solid precedence and foundation of numerous papal approbations.<sup>62</sup>

### Revised Roman Martyrology

More recently, the revised publication of the *Roman Martyrology* by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2001 became the occasion for renewed discussion of the ecclesial status of St. Philomena. The omission of St. Philomena in the revised *Roman Martyrology* was once again interpreted by various media sources as implying that St. Philomena was no longer a saint recognized by the Church.

Several points must be kept in mind regarding St. Philomena and her omission from the revised *Roman Martyrology*:

1. St. Philomena, as previously stated, was never included into the former

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<sup>60</sup> Congregation of Rites, *AAS* 53, 1961, pp. 168ff.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. for example, Atwater ed., *Butler's Lives*, p. 301-2.

<sup>62</sup> The same theme of "continue as before" regarding popular devotions to St. Philomena after this 1961 liturgical directive was contained in an oral statement of Pope Paul VI as recorded by Bishop Fernandes of Mysore, India, and Ordinary of the Cathedral of St. Philomena in India. In a 1964 letter sent to the Mugnano Shrine by Bishop Fernandes, he testifies to the response given by Pope Paul VI, between the sessions of the Second Vatican Council, to the question: "What must I do for the people in my diocese who are greatly troubled by the decree of the Sacred Congregation regarding St. Philomena?" Paul VI responded "do not let it disturb you and do not disturb your people; let devotion to St. Philomena continue as before" ("prosequiva come prima"), Mugnano Archives, 1964.

Roman martyrologies, even while the papal Magisterium granted the public liturgical veneration, plenary indulgences, and universal approbation to the archconfraternity ecclesiastically erected in her honor.<sup>63</sup>

2. The *Roman Martyrology* does not constitute a comprehensive compilation of every saint and martyr recognized by the Church, and was never introduced by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments as such.
3. The continuation of popular devotion at the Mugnano Shrine with the direct approval of the bishop ordinary of the Diocese of Nola, juxtaposed with the still flourishing worldwide devotion in honor of St. Philomena as manifested in the universal archconfraternity continues with complete ecclesiastical approval, and has moreover

experienced significant worldwide renewal in the past decade.<sup>64</sup>

Any conclusion, therefore, which seeks to negate popular devotion to St. Philomena on the basis of her omission in the revised *Roman Martyrology* would be theologically erroneous and contrary to existing ecclesiastically sanctioned devotional practice to the martyr saint.

### **Present Ecclesial Status**

An authentic evaluation of the present ecclesial status of devotion to St. Philomena would be founded upon the following conclusions as previously discussed:

1. The remains of Filumena were designated as belonging to a Christian virgin and martyr by Msgr. Ponzetti, Custodian of the Sacred Relics for the Holy See on May 25, 1802.<sup>65</sup>
2. The public cultus of St. Philomena, virgin and martyr, was approved in a pontifical decree of Pope Gregory XVI on January 30, 1837, with the approval of the office, mass of common of a virgin and martyr and fourth lesson proper in honor of St. Philomena on August 11.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Solemn Decree of Gregory XVI (January 30, 1837) in Papal Approval of the Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (September 6, 1834); Leo XIII, Papal Approbation of Cord of St. Philomena and Indulgences (December 15, 1883); *Pias Fidelium*.

<sup>64</sup> Fr. Giovanni Braschi, Rector of the Mugnano Shrine, has documented substantial and widespread increase in national and international pilgrimages to the shrine, the extent of which has necessitated major reconstruction at the shrine for the extended housing of pilgrims (completed Sept., 2002); archconfraternity chapters have multiplied internationally reaching all five continents, with accentuated increase coming from the British Isles (Ireland, Scotland, Great Britain), the Philippines, and the several locales within the United States; cf. Mugnano newsletters, e-mail dispatches, 2000-2002.

<sup>65</sup> Ponzetti, *Archivi*, p. 271.

<sup>66</sup> Solemn Decree of Gregory XVI (January 30, 1837) in Papal Approval of the Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (September 6, 1834).

3. Nineteen acts of the Holy See during the pontificates of five popes were issued in positive promotion of popular devotion to St. Philomena, in the forms of liturgical cultus, archconfraternities, plenary and partial indulgences.<sup>67</sup>
4. Numerous saints, blessed, and venerables have testified to the reality and exceptional intercessory power of St. Philomena, including Ven. Pauline Jaricot, Bl. Anna Maria Taigi, St. Peter Julian Eymard, St. Peter Chanel, St. Madeline Sophie Barat, St. Magdalene of Canossa, Bl. Bartolo Longo, Bl. Pope Pius IX, St. Pius X, and especially St. John Vianney.<sup>68</sup>
5. The archeological conclusions of Marucchi which placed in doubt the authenticity of the remains of St. Philomena have received significant refutation by Bonavenia, De Rossi, and others at the time of the controversy, and more recently by Fr. Antonio Ferrua, S.J., Secretary of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology.<sup>69</sup>
6. Neither the 1961 directive of the Congregation of Rites to remove St. Philomena from the calendar, nor her omission in the revised *Roman Martyrology* negatively affect the papally established and ecclesiastically approved popular devotion to St. Philomena that continues with Church sanction in our own day.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, if we examine the present Church process of beatification and canonization, we find the following stages: 1. the heroic virtue or martyrdom of the Servant of God must be historically established; when that is accomplished the Servant of God is referred to as “Venerable”; 2. for beatification a miracle must be attributed to the direct intercession of the Servant of God; beatification then permits, by papal decree, restricted public veneration in a particular, limited sphere of the Church such as in particular dioceses, countries or religious communities (usually in the form of a mass and office issued in honor of the blessed); 3. another post-beatification miracle must be attributed to the blessed, which occurred after the process of beatification, whereby public veneration is, by precept, extended to the universal Church by the pontiff.<sup>71</sup> Besides the process of formal canonization, there is also “equivalent canonization,” whereby the formal canonical process has not been introduced, but the Servant of God

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Solemn Decree of Gregory XVI (January 30, 1837) in Papal Approval of the Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (September 6, 1834); Leo XIII, Papal Approbation of Cord of St. Philomena and Indulgences (December 15, 1883); *Pias Fidelium*.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Procès de l'Ordinaire*, pp. 334, 179, 751, 1160, 1325, 1460, 1447; *Procès apostolique*, pp. 288, 768, 1215-1216; Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, p. 197; Ippolito, *Memorie*, pp. 243, 55; cf. also du Manoir, p. 40; Maurin, *Vie nouvelle*; Pierre-Julien Eymard, p. 24; de Grandmaison, *Mère Barat*, p. 198; Bouffier, *Anna-Maria Taigi*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>69</sup> De Rossi, *Inscriptiones christianae*; Bonavenia, *Controversia*, and *La questione*; cf. also the summation of several archeological contributions which offer refutations of the Marucchi theory in Trochu, *Sainte Philomène*, pp. 255-315; Bonavenia, Letter to Mgr. Joseph Cascioli; Ferrua, *Archeological Study*; cf. Prandi, Mustilli, and Guarducci, *Graffiti*, I, p. 501; Markhof, *Das unbequeme Wunder*.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. footnote 64.

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* (January 25, 1983); cf. also *Canonization Process*, Release of the Holy See Press Office, September 12, 1997.

has received more than one hundred years of public veneration and whose sanctity is recognized by the pope.<sup>72</sup>

If we apply these contemporary criteria for beatification and canonization to the case of St. Philomena in a more speculative manner, we find: 1. the discovery of the blood vial and the palm branch symbol at her *loculus*, indicating Christian martyrdom, one of the two criteria for the first stage of canonization (which actually constitutes the highest form of heroic virtue); 2. great numbers of documented miracles which took place at the Mugnano Shrine from 1805 to 1837, inclusive of the papally witnessed miraculous cure of Pauline Jaricot, which led to Gregory XVI's decree granting public liturgical cultus to the particular region of Nola (comparable to the liturgical cultus granted to a "blessed"); and 3. a second great quantity of miracles which were recorded in Church proceedings, both in Mugnano and in Ars, miracles which occurred in a time period following the granting of particular public veneration, and which included the miraculous cure of St. John Vianney.

The papal elevation and extension of the public liturgical cultus of St. Philomena from Nola to other parts of the world, which included the extension of her mass and office to Rome and other dioceses under Bl. Pius IX (Jan. 15, 1857), the erection of the archconfraternity and granting of plenary indulgences in France by Leo XIII (Sept. 24, 1889), and the extending of the archconfraternity of St. Philomena to the universal Church (*Pias Fidelium*, May 21, 1912), illustrate papal approval for universal cultus and veneration of St. Philomena, a universal veneration only appropriate, by the Church's own standards, to the status of a saint. The words of St. Pius X in his apostolic brief which promulgated universal public devotion to St. Philomena through the archconfraternity indicate a papal intention of permanence for that universal veneration of St. Philomena by the Christian faithful throughout the world: "We decree that the present affirmations are and remain always firm, valid, and in effect; in this way, it must be regularly judged; and if anything proceeds in a contrary manner, it will be null and void, whatever its authority may be."<sup>73</sup>

The norms for beatification and canonization and their implementation during the pontificate of John Paul II also bear relevance to the question of the ecclesial status of St. Philomena. In the 1983 Apostolic Constitution, *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, John Paul reiterates through his implementation of norms that *either* martyrdom or heroic virtue has to be historically established for the process of beatification of the candidate, but *not both*. Therefore a miracle is no longer required for the beatification of a martyr, but is still required for a non-martyred confessor of faith.<sup>74</sup> Once martyrdom has been historically verified, the candidate can be immediately beatified without further evidence of a miracle or extended historical documentation of an earthly life of heroic virtue. These revised norms would, in themselves, establish Philomena as a blessed solely in virtue of her historically documented martyrdom, with the subsequent requirement of a documented miracle necessary for formal canonization being easily fulfilled in light of her numerous miracles.

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. T. Ortolan, *DTC*, 2.2: 1634-42; E. Dublanchy, *DTC*, 4.2:2186-87; Benedict XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, Vol. 4, (Prato 1839-42); Green, *Canonization*, NCE, Vol. 3, p. 61.

<sup>73</sup> *Pias Fidelium*, (May 21, 1912), *AAS* 4, 1912, p. 398.

<sup>74</sup> *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, p. 3; cf. also *Canonization Process*, n. 5.

Of the four hundred sixty four saints canonized by John Paul II,<sup>75</sup> approximately eighty percent have been martyrs,<sup>76</sup> which shows the pontiff's concern to offer our contemporary age human witnesses to the primacy of eternity over this life, the transcendence of vision towards Heaven over the immanentism which seems to infect much of our present society of materialism, secularism, and even atheism. Certainly, the witness of a young female martyr, icon of virginal purity and fidelity, would likewise speak to the contemporary need for exemplars of young sanctity and purity, especially for the youth of today.

The origins of the public veneration of the saints in general must also be kept in mind in the assessment of St. Philomena. In the primitive Church, martyrs were immediately recognized as witnessing to the perfection of Christian life on earth, having shown the ultimate proof of their love for Christ by the offering of their lives. By the sacrifice of their lives for Christ, they attained Heaven in eternal glory and were indissolubly united to the Lord, the Head of the Mystical Body. The faithful still under persecution invoked their intercession to obtain the grace to imitate their saintly example. The veneration of the martyrs had, from its historical outset, all essential characteristics of public veneration, including the placing of the date and place of martyrdom upon a public calendar which was observed and celebrated by the entire Christian community. This was certainly distinguished from the sad memorials upon the death of other Christians, as the martyrs were publicly venerated with joy upon the day of their deaths.<sup>77</sup>

It was only near the end of the Roman persecutions that the public veneration offered to martyrs was then extended to *confessores fidei* who, while not dying for the faith, had nonetheless defended and suffered for the faith in heroic ways. Still later was public veneration extended to Christians who had exhibited exceptional holiness in charity, penance, evangelical works, or in the elucidation of doctrine.<sup>78</sup>

This pre-eminence of public veneration for the holiness of martyrdom as expressed in the primitive Church must be acknowledged in assessing the public veneration due today to a young female martyr, whose martyrdom is, once again, historically assured by the official criteria of the Holy See, and whose subsequent plethora of miracles offer the supernatural indication and confirmation from God that the Church strictly requires for modern formal canonization. While a comprehensive historical account of a candidate for canonization is legitimate in seeking to establish the heroic virtue required for a confessor, it should not, by primitive as well as contemporary standards, be required for the declaration of the sanctity of a Christian martyr. When historical requirements beyond the establishment of martyrdom are posed as impediments to the public veneration of a martyr as a "saint," these stray from the ecclesiastical principles for sanctity, both ancient and current. Martyrdom and miracles, not extended personal history, comprise the essence of canonization for those who have shed blood for Christ.

In conclusion, popular devotion to St. Philomena, virgin and martyr, *is presently alive and well amidst the People of God*, enjoying positive ecclesial status and generously increasing veneration. The wisdom of past popes and saints recognized that the "history"

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<sup>75</sup> Total number of saints canonized by John Paul II as of October 7, 2002.

<sup>76</sup> This total includes 103 Korean martyrs (1984); 117 martyrs of Vietnam (1988); and 120 Chinese martyrs (2000); cf. also S. Bunson, *The Saints of John Paul II*, Our Sunday Visitor, 1999.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. H. Delehaye, *Les Origines du culte des martyres*, Brussels, 1933; F. Gagna, *De processu canonizationis a primis ecclesiae saeculis usque ad Codicem iuris caonici*, Rome, 1940; P. Molinari, *Canonization of Saints*, NCE, Vol. 3, p. 55.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

of Philomena's powerful supernatural intercession for the Church was more important than the "history" of her earthly life. Such is the manifestation of the mysterious ways of God's salvific design.

The Church today has received from Pope John Paul II the *missio* for the new evangelization in this third millennium of Christianity.<sup>79</sup> With the recent canonization of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, thaumaturgus of the twentieth century, how efficacious it would be for the People of God and the successful implementation of the new evangelization to have recourse, through a renewed public liturgical veneration, to St. Philomena, whom Pope Gregory XVI rightly designated as the "Thaumaturga of the nineteenth century."<sup>80</sup>

May the young virgin martyr, powerful with God, become, once again, a favored patroness of sanctity and purity, particularly for the youth of today.

Mark Miravalle, S.T.D.  
Professor of Theology and Mariology  
Franciscan University of Steubenville  
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<sup>79</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. de Lucia, *Relazione*, Vol. I, pt. I.