

**M**y dear and esteemed friend Mr. João Clá Dias,<sup>2</sup> the author of this splendid biography of Dona Lucilia Corrêa de Oliveira, was so kind as to ask me to write a Preface that would serve as a presentation or brief introduction. For this purpose, he gave me the entire typewritten text, ready to be sent for printing.

When I began to read these pages, I had no idea of the loftiness of their content. What started out as mere curiosity before the unknown quickly developed into a decided liking, which then grew into true admiration and wonder. What I was reading was not just the biography of an extraordinary woman; it was the life of a real saint, in the full sense of the word. The charm of the writing and its freshness did not wane for an instant. The division of the extensive text into short paragraphs, with headings in boldface presenting the idea about to be fully savoured by the reader, contributed wonderfully to this achievement.

I believe that the best way to give the reader some notion of the documentary wealth in this superb biography of Dona Lucilia is to simply compile the titles of each of its fifteen chapters, together with a brief summary of the corresponding text, which I will now proceed to do.

1. *Mama Taught Me to Love Our Lord Jesus Christ* — These are words of her son, Dr. Plinio. They are followed by the narration of the last moments and holy death of Dona Lucilia. According to Saint Thomas, the end, although last in execution, should always be first in intention.<sup>3</sup> It was most fitting, therefore, to begin with the end.

2. *Birth and Childhood* — We learn about her parents, Dr. Antônio and Dona Gabriela, and the domestic setting of this family of aristocratic ancestry. Lucilia was born April 22, 1876, the second of five children of this gentry couple. Her childhood unfolded pleasantly and serenely, illuminated mainly by the formative influence of her

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1) Extracts from the preface of the first edition.

2) The present preface was written in 1994, when the author had not yet been ordained a priest.

3) Cf. *Summa Theologiæ*, I-II, q.1, a.4.



dear parents, Dr. Antônio and Dona Gabriela. It would be impossible to cite here the thousand delightful little stories of those unforgettable years.

3. *Dona Lucilia's Youth in "São Paulinho" During the Golden Age of Coffee* — Her youth unfolded against the aristocratic backdrop of São Paulo of that time, in tune with her family's social status, and the splendid and prominent mansion that was their home. But this worldly environment in no way jeopardized the spiritual life of the young Lucilia. She made noticeable progress, especially in her deep devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Conception, centred on a pious statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that she had received from her father. Her home was a "*veritable oasis of peace and prayer.*"

4. *Establishing a Home* — A vocation comes from God, Who calls each person in a distinct manner. Dona Lucilia was called to the vocation of matrimony, which she fulfilled by marrying Dr. João Paulo Corrêa de Oliveira, a "*very refined and intelligent*" descendant of an illustrious family from Pernambuco.<sup>4</sup> The wedding was celebrated on July 15, 1906, when Dona Lucilia was thirty years old. On the eve of the marriage, accompanied by her bridegroom, she made her First Holy Communion, an event absurdly delayed in those times preceding the pontificate of Saint Pius X, who opened the Tabernacle to children for all time. With marriage, Lucilia's religiousness was further deepened. She asked the Blessed Virgin "*to teach her to honour her husband as she had honoured Saint Joseph.*" The Lord blessed Lucilia's home with the wonderful gift of two children: Rosenda, who was born in 1907, and Plínio, who came into the world in 1908. From that time on, the life of the mother was fundamentally fused with that of her two dear children.

5. *Voyage to Europe* — Voyages to the Old Continent attracted all the lovers of tradition among the aristocratic class of the *Belle Époque* to which Lucilia belonged; yet this was not the reason for her lengthy trip to Europe in 1912. She made good use of it to foster her piety in numerous churches and other holy sites. There was Berlin, where she forgave those who mistreated her; Cologne, where she admired the marvellous cathedral; Paris, where she quickened her tender devotion to the Sacred Heart at Montmartre, in *Sainte-Chapelle*, *Notre-Dame*, and Our Lady of Victories. From Paris she continued on to Italy, hoping to visit and be blessed by Saint Pius X in Rome,

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4) A state in the northeast of Brazil.

but as this was not possible, it was from Genoa that she returned to Brazil.

6. *The Children's Upbringing* — Rosenda and Plinio learned from their mother the intricate task of balancing refined simplicity and sweetness with a healthy awareness of their high social standing, which, apparently at least, distanced them from an egalitarian treatment with common people. Formed for a society meticulous about attire, jewellery, and ceremonial, they also acquired from Dona Lucilia a strong sense of Christian courtesy, of compassion and generosity toward the needy. When it was a question of duty, her approach was inflexible, although filled with gentleness and sweetness. She was especially adamant about their religious formation, which was principally centred on charity and on a deep-rooted love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Virgin, and the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church.

7. *The Children's Formation in a World of Profound Crisis* — The terrible First World War engulfed the world in a deep moral crisis that endangered even the most sacred values of Christian tradition. To the shock of the whole world, the spectre of communism reared itself triumphantly in Russia, bent on the total destruction of Christian Civilization. A new, so-called "modern" mentality ridiculed and scorned all that was truly traditional. Dona Lucilia energetically opposed these aberrant tendencies and heroically suffered the social ostracism to which she found herself subjected by numerous bad Christians, who were flippantly receptive to the new destructive tendencies. Meanwhile, Plinio, an outstanding student at São Luís School, was preparing himself, through an intense life of piety, for the great apostolic mission that Providence had predestined for him.

8. *Passing the Half-Century Mark* — When Dona Lucilia turned 50 in 1926, little did she imagine that she would live another 42 years to reach the age of 92. She wrote to her son Plinio: "*I must use the time that is left to me to guide and counsel you.*" He was setting out on his arduous public life in defence of the Church and Christian tradition. Having joined the Marian Congregations, Plinio would soon become an undisputed leader and a congressman for the Catholic Electoral League. This entire chapter is filled with gripping details about Dr. Plinio's activities. Dona Rosenda married, and presented Dona Lucilia with a dear granddaughter, Maria Alice. It is impossible to register here the depth of documentary wealth.



9. *Loss of the Family Patrimony* — This absorbing chapter narrates the great tribulations brought upon Dona Lucilia and her family by the loss of a large part of their fortune (which markedly diminished their standard of living) and, above all, by the persecutions Dr. Plinio suffered for reasons to be explained later. In these and in many other tribulations, Dona Lucilia and her son maintained admirable Christian serenity, and forgave all their enemies with impressive magnanimity.

10. *Maintaining Fidelity Amidst the Tempest* — The title aptly expresses the content of this excellent chapter. It continues the account of the difficulties and obstacles that Dr. Plinio encountered in his ceaseless apostolate in favour of the Church and of authentic traditional Christian life. The highlight of this chapter is the admirable correspondence between mother and son. Their letters overflow with Christian wisdom and confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, from Whom they seek and implore the remedy for a host of evils. Dr. Plinio's book, *In Defence of Catholic Action*, appears, which, in 1949, would garner a letter of praise written to the author on behalf of His Holiness Pope Pius XII by the Substitute Secretary of State of the Holy See, Archbishop J.B. Montini, later Pope Paul VI.

11. *A Long and Painful Separation* — A series of circumstances led Prof. Plinio to make an extended trip to the Old Continent in 1950. Although saddened by her son's long and painful absence, Dona Lucilia encouraged him in his demanding undertaking and effectively helped him with excellent advice, through her lengthy and affectionate letters. The correspondence between mother and son makes for highly enjoyable reading and the collection is a real treasure of authentic Christian prudence and wisdom. Dr. Plinio experienced the great joy of receiving a special blessing from Pope Pius XII, who took his hand in his. Dr. Plinio's journey through Europe spanned a little over two months (from April to June of 1950).

12. *A New Home, a New Separation* — In their excellent new apartment on Alagoas Street, where they had moved from their former residence on Vieira de Carvalho Street, life unfolded pleasantly for mother and son, who were closely united in dedication to their apostolic ideals and profound spiritual life. But Dr. Plinio was soon obliged to travel to Europe again to strengthen ties established on the previous trip and to forge new contacts. Dona Lucilia, then over 76

years of age, accepted the separation and continued helping her son with her marvellous letters.

13. *Serene Pilgrimage Along the Paths of Old Age* — The years went by, filling Dona Lucilia's old age with joy and sorrow: joy at seeing the growth of her son's apostolic movement at the service of the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church; sorrow and affliction at seeing the unjust persecution that hovered over Dr. Plinio and his work from those who should have most helped him. Dona Lucilia endured everything, strengthened by prayer and confidence in the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin. Her interior life was that of a true saint.

14. *A Soul Conformed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus* — Mr. João Clá writes: "*The 1960s opened a new and deep chasm of horrors, which would culminate in the anarchist revolution of May 1968. During the last years of her life, Dona Lucilia's graciousness and her respectful manner shone more than ever, in contrast with the increasing vulgarity of the modern world.*" With perfect dominion over her own emotions, she resolutely accepted recurring separations from her son due to his frequent departures for apostolic trips. Dona Lucilia's spiritual life was a continuous prayer and a losing of herself in the adorable Heart of Jesus under the maternal gaze of the Immaculate Virgin, to which the biography gives ample testimony.

15. *Unforgettable Months of Ineffable Conviviality* — In her extreme old age—she was then 91—Dona Lucilia suffered, beyond the many aches and discomforts inherent to aging, new and painful trials, mostly brought on by the torrent of reversals that suddenly befell Dr. Plinio in 1967, including a serious illness that threatened his life, as well as persecutions and calumnies. She bore everything with superhuman heroism, fully and joyfully accepting the will of God. Finally, the eternal day dawned for her. As she completed exactly 92 years, on the morning of April 21, 1968, Dona Lucilia, "*with eyes wide open, fully conscious of the solemn moment that was approaching, she raised herself slightly, made a large Sign of the Cross, and with utter peace of soul and trust in divine mercy, fell asleep in the Lord,*" to awaken among the Angels.

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Our concise index of the chapters in Dona Lucilia's biography written by Mr. João S. Clá has brought us up to this point. This brief synopsis cannot possibly present the vast documentary wealth the author succeeded in gathering firsthand (many of its pages contain personal accounts of contact with Dona Lucilia). We have in hand an au-



thentic and complete *Life of Dona Lucilia* on par with the finest “Lives of the Saints” that have appeared to this day. Particularly noteworthy is its invaluable written correspondence between Dona Lucilia and her children, especially Dr. Plinio. In her magnificent letters, Dona Lucilia frequently expresses such sublime spiritual truths that the reader experiences sentiments similar to those produced by the inimitable epistolary writing of St. Teresa of Avila.

For this very reason, I dare to frame in concrete terms a question that naturally and clearly comes to mind with the reading of this marvellous *Life of Dona Lucilia*: Was Dona Lucilia a true *saint*, in the full sense of the word? Or, to put it differently, did her Christian virtues reach the *heroic degree* indispensably required for a person to be recognized by the Church with beatification and canonization?

In view of the rigorously historical data that this biography offers us in such abundance, I dare to answer, without the least hesitation, with a resounding *yes*.

Far be it from me to ridiculously and irreverently presume to place myself ahead of the infallible judgment of the Church! The role that befits me is to present an opinion that is totally sincere, but completely fallible. We can always err; the Church never does.

Nevertheless, my opinion—while always susceptible to error—would seem to be firmly grounded on the following theological reasoning. It is well known that in the long and painstaking process for the beatification and canonization of a servant of God, it is first necessary to demonstrate, with absolutely clear and unequivocal proofs and testimonies that the person in question practiced *the Christian virtues to a heroic degree*, that is, the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and the moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, with all the other virtues derived from them). A canonization is not possible without thoroughly verified heroic virtues. Contrary to what many hold, candidates need not have performed a miracle during their mortal life. This has no relevance and does not add to the heroic virtues, which are the sole fundamental and substantial element. As we know, a miracle is a grace *gratis data*, which the Lord gives to whom He pleases, independent of their being true saints or not. The overwhelming majority of canonized saints performed no miracles during their mortal lives, although they must do so after their death, as we shall see. Fitting proof of this is that the Queen of Saints, the Immaculate Virgin herself, worked no miracle during her earthly life. It is true that at the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus performed His first great mir-



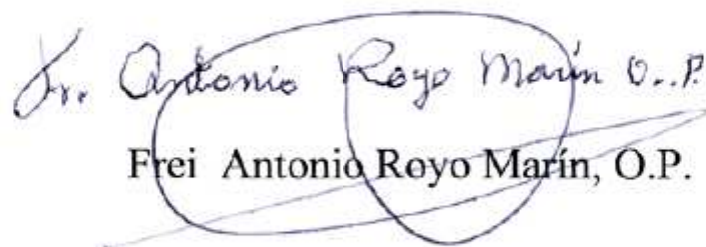
acle at His Mother's request, changing water into the finest wine, but the miracle was His and not hers; she was content to simply request it of Him, without performing it herself.

However, after a holy death, a miracle clearly obtained through the intercession of the canonizable candidate is needed. Why after death and not before? Not *before*, because it is not necessary for sanctity, as we have just explained; but rather *after*, so that the Church may have irrefutable proof that God wills the beatification (or canonization, if there is a second miracle) of the servant of God, who is known to have practiced the Christian virtues to a heroic degree, the fundamental and essential point. The miracle after death is like a *divine seal* that guarantees the certitude of the Church in proceeding with the beatification or canonization.

The final word belongs to the Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the infallible mistress of the truth. But to us falls the sweet duty and the sacred right to humbly beseech Divine Providence to heed our heartfelt petition, for the glory of God and the greater good of souls.

Madrid, June 29, 1994.

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