

Item #14

Don Gonzalo de la Maza, “Santa Rosa of Lima According to a Pious Accountant,” in *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, edited by Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (New York: SR Books, 2002), 198-206.

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Santa Rosa of Lima
According to a Pious Accountant

(1617)

1617, only eight days after her death. One source of information about her life and how she was perceived by her principal devotees and promoters just after she died are the declarations that Don Gonzalo de la Maza made between September 16 and October 6 in response to thirty-two questions put by a tribunal of judges to him and seventy-four other witnesses in the first stage (*proceso ordinario*). (Some 147 other witnesses were heard during a second stage—*proceso apostólico*—conducted between 1630 and 1632.) For reasons that will become clear, de la Maza's testimony is perhaps the most substantial of those collected in the first round of investigations. Excerpts from it are collected in the selection that follows.

Santa Rosa of Lima (1586–1617) was one of some fifty-five people (forty-three men and twelve women) canonized by the Catholic Church between 1588 and 1767. She died at the age of thirty-one on August 24, 1617, and was beatified in 1668 and canonized in 1671 (on April 12), judged heroic in virtue more quickly than an extraordinary cluster of certified saints and holy people who were her contemporaries and near-contemporaries in Peru. Most notably, the Franciscan Francisco Solano, who died in 1602 and was beatified in 1675, and the archbishop of Lima, Toribio Alfonso de Mogrovejo, who died in 1606 and was beatified in 1679, were both canonized in December 1726. Rosa's fellow Dominicans Juan Macías (1585–1645) and the Mulatto Martín de Porras (1579–1639) were not even beatified until October 1837. Within the half-century following her death, Rosa's patronal relationship with the city of Lima grew and soon extended well beyond it. Even before she was canonized, she became patron of Peru (1669) and of the Americas and Philippines archipelago (1670). Rosa's cult subsequently spread to pockets of devotion in Europe. Her example sheds light on religion and some of its functions in the period we are studying.

At the request of the head of the Dominican Order, the process of accumulating the testimonial evidence that would determine Rosa's sanctity began promptly on September 1,

[We join the testimony of Don Gonzalo de la Maza at his answer to the fourth question.]

Answering the fourth question, this witness explained that he had known the said Rosa de Sancta María for about five years, and he told of the personal contact he had with her. Although this witness had wanted to make her acquaintance years before, knowing the considerable virtue she possessed, he had not done so out of respect for her rigorous seclusion. His first direct experience came on the occasion when the said Rosa de Sancta María wrote to this witness asking him to assist her in a charitable deed, which greatly delighted him. However, he was afraid to disturb her tranquillity, until one day soon thereafter this witness chanced to see her enter his house with her mother, the said María de Oliva, and his wife, Doña María de Usátegui. As strangers, they [the three women] had met and spoken in the Jesuit church, for she [Doña María], too, wanted to meet the said Rosa. And for much of the time between that day and the one on which she passed from this life, he saw a lot of the said Rosa de Sancta María in his house with his wife and daughters due to the special affection they all had for one another. Rosa's taking of a room in this witness's house was favored both by her natural parents and by her spiritual fathers [her confessors], with whom she communicated. Sometimes, it was even by their orders, as this witness learned from her confessors, Padre Maestro Lorenzana of the Order of Saint Dominic and Padre Diego Martínez of the Society of Jesus. Through her stay and his personal exchanges with her, this witness learned of the beginnings of her calling.

Rosa told this witness of an incident that occurred when she was about five years old, while she was playing with one of her brothers, Hernando, who was two years older. Rosa [then Isabel] had grown beautiful blonde hair and [on this occasion] it had been handled roughly and soiled by her said brother. Once she saw the state of it, she started to cry. Her brother asked why she cried. Did she not know that on account of [worrying over] their hair many souls were in Hell? Knowing this, she should not be crying over her hair. [Rosa said] that this retort had so imprinted itself in her heart that in thinking about it she was seized by so great a fear in her soul that from that moment on she did not do a thing, not one thing, which she understood to be a sin and an offense to God Our Father. From this fear Rosa gained some knowledge of the divine goodness, which helped her [understand things about] her grandmother [who had died] and a sister, a little older than her, who died at the age of fourteen. [Rosa was now able to see them] as souls that, in her opinion, had been very pleasing to Our Lord, [and] whose deaths had been a great consolation to her because the things she had seen in them and been given to understand by His Divine Majesty convinced her that they had certainly gone to Heaven.

Thus, the said Rosa de Sancta María said to this witness that at that tender age she had dedicated to God Our Lord the gift of her virginity, with a vow [of chastity], and that, to this witness's understanding, the great outward modesty and purity of life attained by the said Rosa suggested that she honored the said promise not only in her deeds but also in her thoughts, as one of her spiritual fathers expressed it to this witness. And her introspection was such that the said Rosa also revealed to the witness that in her life she had neither seen nor longed for a feast day or worldly celebration, not even a common procession, and that during the time that he knew her he clearly perceived this [to be a true account of] her way of withdrawal [from the world] and devotion. She withdrew not only from direct communication but also from seeing people and [worldly] things in order that they might neither impede nor delay the serenity of her soul, the power of which this witness saw at that time to be so focused that he beheld it with great admiration.

And as much [was true] in other senses, because this witness never saw her tongue move to utter an unnecessary thing. [This was true] in her answers or advice to others, in her praise of the Lord and in her encouragement of others to give praise. Her words were so careful and serious that they demonstrated very well that it was God who moved her. She was so chaste in her speech that if she said something that might be understood in more than one sense, she added, "What I am saying" or "I wish to say." She wanted everyone to do the same, as was demonstrated on the occasions when other people recounted something she had said or done. If [the relation of her words or acts] was not undertaken with absolute precision, she pointed out whatever was wanting with complete courtesy, [noting] that she had said or done this [or that]. And this witness noticed this perfection of the truth in her speech until she died. [In fact, this was] so much the case that on the very day she died, a devoted friar had come and asked one of the people who were attending Rosa in her illness if it would be acceptable for Father So-and-So, for whom Rosa had asked, to enter, at which point the said Rosa, though in very great anguish and pain, spoke up, saying, "I said I wished to see him before I die."

The downward cast of her eyes was notable, so much so that this witness said that, in communicating with her so familiarly and with such openness that he called her his mother, it was amazing how few times he saw her lift her gaze. She was so chaste and pure in her sensibilities that in no manner would she attend conversations that were not spiritual and directed toward the good of souls and the service of Our Lord. And if it happened otherwise, or if some person began to speak on secular themes, with very great modesty she attempted to divert them or absent herself from the conversation, as this witness saw in his house on many occasions. Thus, in the time they knew one another, it was very rare for her to go out [or be among] people from outside the house, not counting the times in which some spiritual fathers visited, because the whole of her interest was in retreat and solitude. . . .

The day of her birth is recorded in her father's book and the certificate of baptism. Concerning the day of her death [in order to establish her age at death], it occurred in this witness's house on Thursday, August 24, Saint Bartholomew's Day, one half hour after midnight. And after the said beginning of her calling, the said

Rosa de Sancta María told this witness that she scorned the things of this mortal life, such as trying to impress people and be their object of curiosity. To manage this, for some time she had worn the habit of Saint Francis until, at the age of twenty or twenty-one years, she dressed in that of Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine of Siena, her mother, whom she had wanted to imitate since the beginning of her life, and become a nun of her order. And this witness has never heard, understood, or seen anything which contradicts what he has said, nor anything against the virtue, honesty, spiritual absorption, and virginal purity of the said Rosa de Sancta María. This is his answer to the question. . . .

To the sixth question . . . Although they kept secret her mortifications of the flesh and penances until she died, this witness and his family knew of her way of life. This witness said that from a young age she was given to mortify herself with fasts, scourges, and other [self-inflicted] sufferings, and that from early on she had subsisted on bread and water for many days [at a time]. And, from the age of ten or eleven years she kept to her fasts of bread and water, especially on the days that her mother would excuse it, that is, on the Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays of each week. At the age of fifteen and sixteen years she had made a conditional vow to forego meat and to fast on bread and water for the rest of her life. . . .

This witness observed her abstinence when she lived in his house, during which time even when she had a fever and her doctors and confessors ordered her to eat meat, she would not do it. Her fasts on bread and water were continuous. . . . [In fact,] this witness saw that she would go a day or two or more without eating or drinking anything, particularly on the days when she took Holy Communion, because at certain times of the year confessors granted permission for one to take Communion every time one went to church, and this is what she did with much modesty and without drawing attention to herself. During these fasts and abstinences, [when] she left the church or her secluded room in his house, she had such color [in her face] and showed such health [that it seemed] as if she was fortifying herself with plenty of nutritious dishes. Worrying over her stomach pains and all that she suffered, one would ask her why she did not eat anything, to which she ordinarily responded that Holy Communion made her feel full to bursting and that it was impossible for her to eat [even] a bite. . . .

[It often happened that in ill health Rosa would be made to eat meat and other food, especially by her well-meaning mother, but also by doctors and her worried confessors. In this witness's experience, these feedings had the effect of worsening Rosa's condition.] During one of her dangerous illnesses three years ago, the doctors forced her to eat meat, which left her weary and so short of breath that she could walk no more than a few steps for many days. She said that it [her worsened condition] had resulted from her distress at having eaten meat, and she began getting better when she resumed her abstinence. . . . During the time that the said witness knew her, the said Rosa's manner of abstinence was such that the amounts she ate even when she was not observing it [her fast of bread and water] did not, to him, seem enough to sustain the life of a human body, especially one so young. . . .

To the seventh question this witness answered that he knew for a fact that since the beginning of her life the said Rosa de Sancta María performed continuous and rigorous mortifications of the flesh, usually with iron chains. And this witness knew [about these mortifications] from what he had heard from her, her mother, some of her confessors, his wife the said Doña María de Usátegui, and his two young daughters, from whom, even given their tender ages and the love and concern he had for them, he did not deny exposure to [Rosa's] virtuous example.

With the same certainty, this witness learned that for a long time she [Rosa] had worn an iron chain wrapped two or three times around her waist and fastened with a padlock for which she had no key. [At one point when] she was in her mother's house, she developed a very severe pain in her abdomen, and the chain had to be removed in order for her to be helped. She suffered much as the lock was broken because her skin and, at some parts, her flesh had become stuck to the said chain, as this witness saw after Rosa's death.

Because all of this information was communicated to his wife, the said Doña María de Usátegui, on the understanding that it might be told to this witness, he also understood with the same certainty that she [Rosa] had employed different hairshirts, and that she had worn one with very rough bristles [that extended] from her shoulders down to her knees. For a long time she had worn tunics with sackcloth on the inside until, after two years, her confessors noticed her health so diminished that they took them away. This witness had seen them on the occasions when she changed them and hung them out in the sun. By order of her confessors, from that time [when the rough tunics were forbidden] until the point of the illness from which she died, her simple outfits were brought to her, on which occasions this witness also saw that she changed them.

The said Rosa de Sancta María sometimes told this witness and his wife and daughters that from an early age she had greatly detested putting on a good appearance for people and the care taken by her mother in arranging her hair, face, and clothes. Seeing that she was not getting very far [toward the realization of her ascetic designs] with her mother, at the age of twelve years she cut off her very blonde head of hair, at the sight of which her mother scolded her harshly. [But her quests continued.] Feeling that her fasts and mortifications were not sufficient to drain the color from her cheeks, she poured pitchers of cold water over her chest and back even when she was dressed. Because of this, or because of divine will and providence, she contracted an illness at the age of thirteen years and became crippled and [had to be] clamped to a bed by her hands and feet for a long time. [She suffered] a great pain over her entire body that could not be explained, but, in bearing it, a very great relief and comfort came to her, in [knowing] that on account of Heaven her patience and compliance with the divine will had never faltered. She told this witness that on this occasion, as on others, Our Lord had rewarded her with so much pain, of a kind she had not believed a human body could withstand. [It was] nothing like the kind [of pain] He Himself had suffered, [she had said,] yet she was bewildered at having enjoyed so much forgiveness from God's hand, [considering] it was not possible that this [reward] would be bestowed on so wretched a creature as herself.

This witness also understands it to be a certain thing [based on what he had learned] from his wife the said Doña María de Usátegui, and from other people, that the bed in which Rosa slept until the age of one and a half or two years in her parents' house, [eventually] taken by her confessors, was a *barbacoa*, a small platform of rather coarse canes, like those used for threshing wheat in Spain. [It was] bound together by leather cords, with sharp, two- or three-cornered shards of an earthenware jug scattered over it and between the said canes. . . .

And after the said bed was taken away, and put on a shelf so that the said shards would not fall away, this witness knows that the said Rosa de Sancta María normally slept either on a plank of wood with a blanket, or seated in a small chair, as she did the whole time she lived in this witness's house. . . . This witness also knew that from the beginning of her life the said Rosa de Sancta María had endeavored to punish her body by depriving herself of sleep, and there came a time when in a day and night she slept no more than two hours, and sometimes less. . . .

And, on the matter of her ways and mortifications, from one of Rosa de Sancta María's spiritual fathers this witness has heard [of one of her methods] to be able to keep praying when she was overcome by drowsiness. She set about tying together a number of the hairs at the front [of her head], [hairs] which concealed a crown of thorns that she wore [underneath], [and then attaching these knots] to a nail she had driven into the wall of her refuge. [Thus,] she would be virtually hanging [there], only able to reach the floor with difficulty. And in this way she conquered weariness and continued her prayers. . . .

To the twenty-ninth question he answered that he has heard said that there have been many, and very exceptional, miracles performed by Our Lord God for the greater glory of His name and in demonstration of the virtue and sanctity of the blessed Rosa. [By these miracles] many people with different maladies, [who] entrust themselves to her intercession [by] touching some traces of her clothing and the earth from around her tomb, have been restored to health. This witness defers to the testimonies and proof of the said miracles.

Since the day on which the body of the said blessed Rosa was buried in the chapter room of the said convent of Saint Dominic, every time this witness entered [the chapter room] he has found a great gathering of people of all orders, stations, and sexes, and at the tomb this witness has seen many of the sick, crippled, and maimed.

And in the same way he has observed what is [equally] well known, [namely,] the veneration and devotion which the notables of this city, like the rest of the general population, have for the blessed Rosa de Sancta María and for the things that were hers [and that were associated with her life]. [This is demonstrated] by the number of people of all stations who have gathered at this witness's house to visit the rooms in which the blessed Rosa stayed and died. In particular, there have been very few, if any, distinguished women who have failed to turn up in this witness's house to ask for relics from the clothing and other things that belonged to the blessed Rosa. And the same [close attention] has been paid by important men; indeed, the first one whom this witness saw request relics was Dr. Francisco Verdugo, the inquisitor of this realm, and this witness sent them to him. And [then]

there was the judge from the royal Audiencia who has come twice to ask for them. The demand has been such that if the tunics and habits which she left were many, they [still] would not have been enough to share in very tiny parts among the people who have come with such great affection and devotion. [One notes] particularly the monks from the five religious orders and the nuns in the convents of this city, whose requests [for relics] have not been small.

The flow of people who have visited the house of Rosa's parents in which she grew up and lived has been of no less magnitude. [They visit] the little cell that was her room, taking from it what they have been able to prize away and remove, even the little latch from the door, as this witness has seen, and [even] the threshold and planks are cut out from the room and its door. There was one time when this witness wanted to do the same, and he visited her parents only to find so many people and coaches and horses outside the door and in the street that he returned [home, having been] unable to enter. . . .

What this witness had most noticed were the tears shed by many people [while] talking about the life and things of the blessed Rosa. Some friar-confessors told him of the exceptional conversions of souls and arduous transformations of [people's] lives that had occurred among those who commended themselves to the blessed Rosa after her death. Other people, especially devout women, have told this witness they wanted to receive the habit that the blessed Rosa had worn and to found the convent of Saint Catherine of Siena that she [Rosa] so much desired. A prelate of a religious order, and not even the Dominicans, has told him the same thing. And this witness knew a maiden whom he took to be very virtuous, who now was attempting to imitate the life of the blessed Rosa. And [there are] spiritual people, very devout, among them some friars, who have said to this witness that since the death of the blessed Rosa de Sancta María they have received from Our Lord remarkable favors and rewards, much better than those which they had received before. And this he knows and is his response to this question.