Blessed Solanus Casey's Pastoral Care:

A Model of "Marian Referral"

By

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Abstract

This paper explores the pastoral care practices of Blessed Solanus Casey, focusing on his intentional use of "Marian referral" as a model for integrating personal devotion with pastoral caregiving. Solanus's deep trust in the Blessed Mother and his willingness to guide others to her intercession reveal a thoughtful, faith-filled approach to spiritual referrals. Drawing from his personal writings and testimonies of his ministry, the paper highlights how Solanus prepared care-seekers to embrace Mary's help, fostering trust and openness through his humility and lived experience. His practice demonstrates that personal faith and spiritual resources, when shared with intentionality and love, can profoundly impact the lives of those in need. This study offers both pastoral caregivers and the faithful a practical example of how spiritual referrals, especially to Mary, can serve as a vital tool for healing, peace, and deeper union with God.

Introduction: The Problem of Spiritual Referrals in Pastoral Ministry

Pastoral caregivers today are tasked with addressing an increasingly diverse range of issues, from emotional struggles to spiritual crises. It is widely recognized that some challenges extend beyond a caregiver's expertise, requiring a referral to someone more equipped to help. The art of making referrals has, therefore, become an essential skill in pastoral formation. Across denominational lines, resources like Clinebell's classic *Basics of Pastoral Care*[1] and the training provided through Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) emphasize the importance of referring care-seekers to psychological, medical, or social services when necessary.

Yet, one type of referral is often overlooked: the spiritual referral. This may stem from the assumption that the pastoral caregiver is already the spiritual expert, a guide meant to navigate these particular waters. However, the reality is that holding an ecclesial office or a chaplain's badge does not automatically equip someone to address every spiritual need. What, then, should a pastoral caregiver do when they encounter a spiritual issue beyond their competence? My suggestion is simple but significant: they should consider a spiritual referral.

This paper explores the concept of spiritual referrals within the Roman Catholic tradition, focusing on the remarkable example of Blessed Francis Solanus Casey (1870–1957). As an Irish-American Capuchin friar with a profound devotion to Mary, Solanus regularly directed those who sought his help to the Blessed Mother. These referrals were not made lightly nor without thought; they were intentional, compassionate responses tailored to the specific needs of each individual. Solanus's example thus offers a powerful case study of what I term "Marian referral."

Through an analysis of Solanus's pastoral role, his personal relationship with Mary, and the practices he used in referring people to her care, this paper aims to highlight the value of

[1] Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, 3rd ed., updated and revised by Bridget Clare McKeever (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

spiritual referrals as a way of intertwining personal devotion and pastoral accompaniment. Beyond that, it seeks to inspire both pastoral caregivers and the faithful at large to consider how such referrals might enrich their own lives and ministries. Solanus's life serves as a reminder that turning to trusted spiritual resources, like Mary, can open the way to healing, peace, and a deeper encounter with the love of God.

Solanus the Pastoral Caregiver

Blessed Solanus Casey's approach to pastoral care was rooted in a warmth and openness that immediately put people at ease. James Patrick Derum, one of his earliest biographers, described Solanus as "[h]umble and without pretense," noting that "You felt his goodness."[2] This simple yet profound goodness shaped every interaction he had with those who sought his help. Solanus possessed an extraordinary gift for being fully present to others—a skill that revealed itself in the way he listened. Whether it was a visitor at the door or someone in deep distress, Solanus welcomed each person with an attentive spirit, a gentle smile, and a word of encouragement. Br. Leo Wollenweber's characterization capture's Solanus's image well:

> [He was] the one friar whom everyone wanted to see…He was everybody's friend, and like [a] good friend he was always available…Every visitor was important to Solanus. He never hurried anyone. With complete attention he patiently listened to each tale of concern for a sick child or parent or friend. Gently he would speak of God's love and how God turns trials to blessings. He would try to share his own deep faith and trust in God with the person before him…Solanus's strong faith would inspire people. He would help them grow in faith so that they could pray in faith.[3]

Solanus was a patient, present caregiver who modeled the faith he hoped to inspire in his visitors.

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[2] James Patrick Derum, *The Porter of Saint Bonaventure's: The Life of Father Solanus Casey, Capuchin* (Detroit, MI: Fidelity Press, 1968), 16.

[3] Leo Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit: The Life of Blessed Solanus Casey* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2022), 43–44.

One memorable story illustrates his unique approach to caregiving. A young mother, distraught over her ailing child, brought her worries to Solanus. He listened attentively, absorbing her concerns with his characteristic calmness. After she finished, he gently reassured her, saying, "Don't worry, everything will be all right." This bold promise was rooted in his unshakable faith and spiritual charisms. Though he offered little more than his quiet assurance, a prayer, and his attentive presence, the impact was profound. The woman later testified that her child recovered, attributing the healing to Solanus's unwavering faith and kindness.[4]

What set Solanus apart was his ability to make each person feel genuinely seen and valued, a quality deeply rooted in his humble imitation of Jesus Christ. As the *Positio* describes, Solanus strove to emulate Christ through his modesty and humility.[5] Though never given prominent positions or offices, he lived simply, accepting corrections calmly and even joyfully. This simplicity of life and spirit allowed him to meet others with openness and sincerity, drawing people to himself not through grand gestures but through consistent kindness and genuine care.

Stationed as the porter—a role that placed him in constant interaction with visitors—Solanus's humility became the heart of his caregiving. He never sought credit for the healings or remarkable outcomes attributed to his prayers. Instead, he embodied the Capuchin tradition of humility, following the example of St. Felix of Cantalice, the first Capuchin saint. Like St. Felix, whose characteristic phrase was "*Deo Gratias*" ("Thanks be to God"), Solanus directed thanksgiving not towards himself but God. Often, he pointed to the Seraphic Mass Association as

[4] Leo Wollenweber, OFM Cap., "Seven Days with Solanus Casey: A Creative Spirituality," *Franciscan Media*, July 30, 2022, accessed December 5, 2024, https://www.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/ seven-days-with-solanus-casey-a-creative-spirituality/.

[5] Peter Gumpel and Michael Crosby, "Humility," *Positio for the Cause of Canonization of Fr. Solanus Casey*, published by The Congregation for Causes of Saints, July 11, 1995, excerpts available at https:// www.solanuscasey.org/about-blessed-solanus-casey/the-positio/, accessed December 5, 2024.

the true source of intercessory grace, further underscoring his conviction that he was merely a conduit of God's love.[6]

This humble, unassuming demeanor made Solanus a powerful witness to the ministry of presence. He made each visitor feel valued, meeting them with the same openness and simplicity that defined his life. His caregiving went beyond offering comfort; it often renewed the faith of those who came to him, leaving them with a sense of peace and a deeper trust in God. Solanus's example reminds us that effective pastoral care does not require extraordinary actions. Often, it is the steady, compassionate presence of someone who embodies Christ's humility and love that makes the greatest difference.

Solanus the Devoted Son of Mary

Blessed Solanus Casey's profound devotion to the Blessed Mother was a cornerstone of his spiritual life and ministry. This deep filial connection is perhaps best seen in the story of his vocational discernment. After facing academic challenges that thwarted his early attempts to join the diocesan priesthood, Solanus found himself at a crossroads. Unsure of what to do next, he turned to the one he trusted most—the Blessed Mother. Committing himself to a novena, he fervently sought her intercession for guidance. On the final day of prayer, he felt a clear prompting in his heart to "go to Detroit." Trusting this as Mary's answer, he acted without hesitation, traveling to Detroit to enter St. Bonaventure Monastery, where the Capuchin friars welcomed him. This pivotal moment confirmed for Solanus Mary's active role in his life and solidified his identity as her devoted son.[7]

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[6] For more information on the Association and its place in Solanus's ministry, see Derum, *Porter of Saint Bonaventure's*, 138–151 and Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 35-41.

[7] Cf. Catherine M. Odell, *Father Solanus: The Story of Solanus Casey, O.F.M. Cap.* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1988), 41-42; Derum, *Porter of St. Bonaventure's*, 59-67; Wollenweber, 14-15.

His devotion to Mary did not end with his entrance into the Capuchin order. Solanus developed a particular affection for the work of Blessed Mary of Agreda, *The Mystical City of God*, which he regarded as nothing less than Mary's own autobiography. This text, which he discovered shortly after his ordination, offered deep insights into the life of the Virgin Mary and resonated profoundly within his soul. Solanus wrote passionately about its significance, describing it as "the real life of the Blessed Mother of God—Mary Immaculate ever Virgin—Queen of the Universe."[8] For him, studying this text was not a mere intellectual exercise but a spiritual journey into the heart of Mary's relationship with God.[9] Through praying the four volumes of this book on his knees, he felt that he had become personally acquainted with Mary.[10]

Encouraging others to follow this path, Solanus often invited people to immerse themselves in Mary's life as a way to deepen their own faith: "Studying Mary's life… is learning to love… God in His works—His Masterpiece." [11] To him, Mary was the epitome of divine grace and virtue—the "Masterpiece of all masterpieces."[12] He believed that coming to know her was essential for drawing closer to Jesus:

> Jesus was given to us through Mary, and only through Mary can we go to Jesus. Only through her and with her can we arrive at true devotion to the Sacred Heart of her divine Son—where the love of God is everything to the soul and the soul is everything to God.[13]

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[8] Solanus Casey, *Collected Writings Attributed to Blessed Solanus Casey, OFM Cap.* Vol I, notarized by Charles Dillen, 271, accessed December 5, 2024, https://www.solanuscasey.org/about-blessed-solanus-casey/writings-of-solanus/.

[9] Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 53-55.

[10] Michael H. Crosby, *Thank God Ahead of Time: The Life and Spirituality of Solanus Casey* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009), 237.

[11] Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I, 269.

[12] Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I, 271.

[13] Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I, 45.

For Solanus, Mary was more than a theological figure; she was a living, compassionate mother eager to assist her children: "Mary is the Mother of God, and by His divine wisdom, power, and merciful condescension, the Blessed Mother of redeemed humanity, therefore our Blessed Mother also."[14] His personal experiences of her intercession strengthened his confidence in directing others to her care. The simplicity of his devotion and trust is apparent in his own words, e.g., "unpleasant situations will always come out right if we only have a little confidence in the good God and our Blessed Mother."[15] This simple, hallmark faith was inspired by Mary's own life: "there is no more beautiful example of confidence in God than that of Mary."[16]

In his pastoral practice, referring souls to Mary was never a way of shirking his responsibility. Mary was not a way around the suffering of others but a pathway through it: "Get acquainted with the Queen of Martyrs—God's Mother suffering—and you will learn something of how we ought to love sorrow and pains in this life."[17] Referral to Mary, like suffering itself, was thus a profound act of love and faith, connecting people to the one who could lead them most directly to her Son. It was an instantiation of his own prayer: "Next to Jesus Himself, and always with Him, may [the Blessed Virgin Mary] ever be our refuge and our stay during this pilgrimage on earth."[18] Solanus's personal devotion and trust in Mary remind us that referrals must be rooted in genuine faith. One does not direct a care-seeker elsewhere unless convinced they will find even greater help and healing at the next step.

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[14] Casey, *Collected Writings*, quoted in Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 111.

[15] Casey, *Collected Writings*, quoted in Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 108-109.

[16] Casey, *Collected Writings*, quoted in Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 111.

[17] Casey, *Collected Writings*, quoted in Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 111.

[18] Casey, *Collected Writings*, quoted in Wollenweber, *Gratitude and Grit*, 111.

Solanus's Praxis of "Marian Referral"

Solanus's letters to those who sought his counsel demonstrate how deeply he believed in Mary's active role in their lives and give examples of spiritual referral, which aided rather than replaced his accompaniment. We will now examine a few select cases of Marian referral in Solanus's practice to become acquainted with his style and approach.

Textual and Testimonial Evidence

First, to a woman struggling with health issues, he wrote, "Your promotion of devotion to our dear Blessed Virgin Mother Mary by means of the rosary and the scapular will surely bring untold blessings on you and yours."[19] In this case, we see that he encouraged her to continue cultivating her relationship with Mary through practical devotions, confident that Mary's maternal care would bring her comfort and grace.

In another letter offering comfort to a grieving woman, he pointed her toward the consolation that Mary offers in times of sorrow, writing, "We'll pray for your intention and try as best we can to foster confidence in God—and in the intercession of our blessed Mother Mary."[20] This counsel was not merely an encouragement to "pray more," but an invitation to experience the depth of Mary's empathy, her motherly presence, and her willingness to intercede, especially in moments of hardship.

Solanus's sense of Mary as a necessary refuge was particularly evident in his view of her role in an age marked by what he saw as "turmoil and uncertainty." Writing to a fellow priest, he asserted, "If ever it were in place to make our Blessed Mother Mary known, then it seems to me

[19] Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II, 248.

[20] Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II, 246.

to be most opportune these days—so full of turmoil and uncertainty."[21] In a time when people grappled with insecurity and doubt, Solanus saw Mary as a stabilizing force, not just a pious symbol but a real maternal presence who could bring peace to anxious hearts. Indeed, fostering devotion to her was, for Solanus, the remedy for "hopeless" situations, the answer to anxiety.[22]

He frequently pointed those seeking his help to the aforementioned *Mystical City of God*. Though there are many references in his personal writings to this work,[23] one particular letter to Margeret LeDoux demonstrates his faith in the power of this spiritual resource.[24] In this letter, Solanus confesses that when enrollment in the Seraphic Mass Association–which, as noted above, was what he usually affirmed as the source of any miracles–failed to provide a cure, he

[21] Casey, *Collected Writings,* Appendix II, 21.

[22] "Many thanks for your favor of May 6th. It is rather hazey [sic] in my memory what your trouble was in December, since I get different cases often mixed. However, I feel you are taking a practical way for any and every "hopeless" -- so called. We'll pray for your intention and try as best we can to foster confidence in God -- and in the intercession of our blessed Mother Mary." Casey, *Collected Writings,* Vol II, 246.

[23] E.g., Casey, *Collected Writings,* Vol. I 173-174, 268, 276, 279-280, Vol. III, 309, Vol. IV, 210, Appendix I, 23.

[24] "Dear Margaret, I am almost disappointed at this long letter because of the many words and hardly anything said. I just meant to type a sort of P.S., and now look where we are! However, before I close, let me tell you a possible remedy for young Edward. For years, when the Seraphic Mass Association and everything else seemed futile—unavailing—I have been recommending the reading of the life of our Blessed Mother Mary, *The Mystical City of God*. It is so much the dear Blessed Virgin's own work—having coached the actual writer—that I and others have been referring to it as the autobiography of our Blessed Mother herself. Of late, I have been trying to read it only after praying to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and guidance, and before my late "(k)nock out," on my knees. I am not certain if I told Mary Casey about that when her brother James, Jr. was expecting to have an operation for osteomyelitis, but I know she made a promise to the Poor Souls at the time that if there were no operation necessary, she'd enroll them fifty times in the said Mass Association. I have known of very remarkable cases. This one I am sure will interest you: Around New Year's 1941, I was inclined to be discouraged about Fr. M. Joachim's condition. I made up my mind—despite the fact that it had taken me nearly eight years to finish the four books before (*The Conception,* 610 pages; *The Incarnation,* 608 pages; *The Transfixion*,790 pages; and *The Coronation,* 610 pages)—that I'd pray them this time on my knees. I had hardly started when Fr. M.J. wrote a letter to Fr. Edward, which I received back from the Philippines with the comment: "This is the best letter I've received from him in years." And before I was through with the first book, he was saying Holy Mass—i.e., on Saint Patrick's Day and four other Masses that week. *Deo Gratias!* On October 16th, I finished the second book, and that day I received about the most encouraging letter from him of any yet. So, have them all get on the job and storm Heaven for poor young Edward and his family, that they get back together as we would all like to see our friends do. With best regards and God's blessing to all, I beg to remain Sincerely yours in the Sacred Heart, Fr. Solanus, O.F.M. Cap. Praised be Jesus—and our Blessed Mother Mary! P.S. Many thanks for the fine photographs. Too bad you didn't have the 22 grandchildren along in the crowd." Casey, *Collected Writings,* Appendix I, 23.

would sometimes recommend a prayerful reading of "the dear Blessed Virgin's own work," the *Mystical City of God*. In this letter, he recounts a time when he used this referral on himself; the source of his confidence, no doubt, was his personal experience of its efficaciousness. In this instance, he made a resolution to pray the over 2500 pages of the four volume book on his knees in intercession for his ailing biological brother and Capuchin confrere Fr. Maurice. Amazingly, he recounts that "before I was through with the first [volume] he was saying Holy Mass… Deo Gratias! On October 16th, I finished the second [volume] and that day I received about the most encouraging letter from him of any yet." He follows the recounting of this personal experience by admonishing Margaret to "Have [everyone] get on the job and storm Heaven for poor young Edward and his family" by praying with the book. Here, we see a particular skill being used by Solanus; he seeks to smooth the path of the referral by creating confidence in it through his own testimony, thus removing obstacles to its completion before giving the recommendation. His language is not commanding but hortatory.

Further examples of referral to Mary through the *Mystical City* abound. In one such instance, Solanus recommended the prayerful reading of "Mary's autobiography" to a Mrs. Wheeler on the occasion of a serious medical procedure for her husband.[25] Later, when the Wheelers were experiencing marital strife, he reminded her to return to reading the book with her husband. That referral to the work of Mary apparently had astounding results![26]

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[25] For a longer account of this episode, see Crosby, *Thank God Ahead of Time*, 165-168.

[26] "The following Friday, the same two ladies came back, quite smiling, and with them was a man with his head shaven and one side taped up. Mrs. Wheeler introduced him: "…This is my husband." He had certainly given the doctors—Peet and Wood of Ann Arbor—one of the surprises of their lives. Together, they declared, as noted in the said letter, that it was "…miraculous that a patient should talk normally four days after such an operation." The doctors had given him, at most, six months to live. I gave Mrs. Wheeler a copy of *The Conception of Mary*, the first book of *The Mystical City of God* by Venerable Mother Mary of Agreda, so that she might learn something in particular about the august Queen of Heaven, our Blessed Mother Mary. At the very least, I hoped she might gain an idea of how sadly those Christians who lack "devotion to Mary" are wanting in this essential feature of Christianity. Such individuals often know little or nothing about the Blessed Mother of God, beyond the general idea that she was

One key to referrals is making sure that care-seekers will be able to receive ongoing care. Solanus often solicited promises of commitment to ongoing care at the hands of the Blessed Virgin if his initial care brought about good results. Two examples can be found in his notes of September 29 and 30, 1937. On the 29th, he received a promise from a Christian Scientist to read the first volume of the *Mystical City of God* if her husband's attitude improved within a week.[27] The following day, he secured a similar resolution from the father and brother of a woman with that ever-disheartening diagnosis from her doctors: "Only a miracle will cure her."[28] Another example, again in the pastoral care of a sick person, is found on Oct. 4, 1943. A sick man increased his devotion to Mary, and Solanus encouraged him further through a gift of the first volume of the *Mystical City*.[29] While not a universal medicine, it is clear enough that Solanus regarded a referral to Mary through the *Mystical City* as an effective referral.[30]

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the mother of Jesus. About a year and a half later, on October 16th, she came to lament that her husband was not acting as he ought of late. I had not seen or heard from them since a week or so after that surprise visit. I asked her if she had kept her promise—particularly about her devotion to the Blessed Virgin. She hung her head and admitted she had neglected to do so. A few nights later, they both returned, seemingly quite happy and satisfied. Evidently, they had earnestly started to keep the promise that she, and probably both of them, had made. At all events, he especially seemed enthusiastic about the book. He surely looked and seemed to feel happy. I have no doubt that if those parents of whom you wrote me—the one baptized a Catholic and the other, though good at heart, with little or no faith—would wake up and turn to the Good God, they would receive a happy surprise. In case they come to New York any time, I would be pleased to see them. In the meantime, we will hope and pray." Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II, 160. (Formatting adjusted).

[27] "Arthur Fleson - 47 - atheist - wife Cr. scientist - away from wife 11 weeks - Wife promises to read 'the Conception of Mary' by Sister Mary of Jesus (Agreda) if husband changes attitude before week is over." Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. III, 309.

[28] "Audrey Tank - 19 - in Ford Hosp. - had operation first when 18 months old - 2nd at 44, and finally Sept. 2 1 last for 'cleft palate Now doctors think 'only a miracle will cure her.' Her brother and Father here To-night promise to read the 'Conception' of Mary Immaculate if Drs. be surprised to-morrow." Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. III, 309.

[29] "Lou Landreville - 32 - in Marine Hospital - back broken thirteen years ago; ten yrs. ago was carried into the Monastery. though that improved slightly at that time. Has been praying earnestly of late to Our Blessed Mother Mary. Has been decidedly improving since. So that we are hopeful that a real miracle may come of the case. Enrolled....5. Gave him No. I City of God - Conception." Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. IV, 210.

[30] I would be remiss to not point the reader towards the example of Solanus's humility in distancing himself from a group, which he initially helped facilitate, devoted to this work. When a certain superior began to take issue with the group's meetings and felt they had begun to abuse Solanus's support by meeting even without him, Solanus

The commendation of a Christian Scientist to Mary in the preceding paragraph may seem a bit surprising to our modern ears, so often wary of giving anything too "Roman Catholic" to someone outside our faith community. However, Solanus seems to have had no such qualms but rather was ready to use all the tools at his disposal, granted he had prepared the care-seeker beforehand to take advantage of the resource. For example, on another occasion, after an initial bit of advice to enroll in the Seraphic Mass Association appears not to have born immediate fruit, he recommended a Lutheran woman turn to Marian devotion in response to her marital difficulties.[31] From this, we see two things. First, a call towards Marian devotion was not his first advice to a Lutheran woman…but enrollment in a *Roman Catholic* Mass Association was! Perhaps ministers should not be so afraid of "stepping on the toes" of other people's religious sensibilities. In a far less ecumenical time, Blessed Solanus proved himself quite the ecumenist by enrolling dozens of people across the belief spectrum, including an atheist![32] Secondly, when the Seraphic Mass Association did not bear fruit, as we noted above, Solanus went to Mary as his

was asked to cut off dealings with them. Though he felt that the group had been misunderstood, he was meekly obedient. However, this incident did not cause him to stop recommending the work altogether. Cf. Crosby, *Thank God Ahead of Time*, 129-131.

[31] "Mrs. Marjorie Warren - 35 - and Family - Husband - Episcopelian - careless in regard to family for some time. - asks for divorce from lutherine [sic] wife. She enrolls the Family To-nite. 18th - No improvement so far in outlook; Mrs. advised to turn to Mary our Blessed Mother." Casey, *Collected Writings*, Vol. IV, 252.

[32] e.g., Atheist, **vol. 4**:35; Baptist, **vol. 4:**122, 178, 224; Christian Church, **vol. 4:**154; Christian Scientist, **vol. 3**:43; Congregationalist, **vol. 4:**160, 218; Disciples, **vol. 4**:93; Episcopalian, **vol. 4:**123, 172, 194, 229; Jewish, **vol. 3:**47, 157; **vol. 4:**91, 139, 141 (x2), 145, 153, 162, 163, 229; Lutheran, **vol. 3:**31, 205; **vol. 4:**20, 23, 67, 71, 124, 140, 175, 189, 195, 196, 198, 222, 228, 252, 259; Methodist, **vol. 4:**188, 228 (x2); Non-Catholic, **vol. 3:**9, 10; **vol. 4:**110, 189, (unbaptized) 200, 213, 220, 266, 268; Orthodox, **vol. 4:**148, (Syrian) 162, (Greek) 168, (Greek) 184, 248, 256 (x2); Presbyterian, **vol. 3:**151, 161; **vol. 4**:1, 35, 92, 128, 130, 188, 192, 195, 197, 207 (x2), (missing in action) 246, 253; Quaker, **vol. 4:**248; Spiritest, **vol. 4:**158; Unbaptized, **vol. 4:**183 from *Index to the Writings of Blessed Solanus Casey*, compiled by Edward Foley, Capuchin https://www.solanuscasey.org/about-blessed-solanus-casey/index-of-writings/

most powerful referral, even for non-Catholics. Perhaps ministers today could become more ready to do the same.

A Cautionary Note on The Mystical City of God

It has been demonstrated that Blessed Solanus had frequent recourse to Blessed Mary of Agreda's work, *The Mystical City of God.* This is the most questionable of Solanus's referral practices, as the work was the source of controversy in Solanus's own time, given that it was a private revelation lacking official ecclesial endorsement. Accordingly, the *Positio* offers a caveat about Solanus's referrals to this work, but ultimately exonerates Solanus's use:

> As already mentioned, he may have been somewhat imprudent in counseling the reading of [*The Mystical City of God*], since the Church had not officially accepted the content of the private revelations of Mary of Agreda. But subjectively speaking, his intentions were certainly good.[33]

This evaluation notes that even if one takes issue with Solanus frequent use of a potentially questionable work, his desire for the good of those who sought his help is unassailable. His personal conviction about the spiritual benefit of reading the work is obvious and he seems to have simply wanted to share a good thing rather than contribute to any controversy. Thus, the value of his example as a pastoral caregiver in general and his art of Marian referral in particular should not be lessened by his use of this work.

Keys to the Success of Solanus's Referrals

Blessed Solanus Casey's referrals to Mary were marked by thoughtfulness and care. Far from being routine or automatic, they were intentional pastoral acts rooted in his deep faith and understanding of the needs of those he served. The success of these referrals can be traced to several key principles that guided his approach.

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[33] Gumpel and Crosby, *Positio*, "Prudence."

First, Solanus carefully prepared the care-seeker to receive the referral. He understood that a referral to Mary would only bear fruit if the individual was open to it. As seen in his letters, he often shared personal experiences or encouraged devotion to Mary as a way of gently leading the care-seeker to trust in her intercession. This preparation was not rushed or forced but adapted to the individual, allowing them to embrace the referral with their own faith and openness. Just as any referral requires openness, Solanus ensured that the path to Mary was clear and inviting.

This preparation was underpinned by Solanus's own unwavering trust in Mary. He referred people to her not as a matter of convenience but out of a profound conviction in her maternal care and intercessory power. His confidence was not hidden but radiated through his words and actions, often inspiring those he counseled to adopt the same faith-filled attitude. This quiet trust in Mary was contagious, helping care-seekers approach her with the same assurance Solanus modeled.

What made Solanus's referrals truly transformative was the authenticity behind them. He did not recommend devotion to Mary as an abstract idea or distant theological concept. He spoke as someone who had personally experienced her care and intercession in his own life. This lived experience gave his words weight and his referrals depth, making them more than mere suggestions. They became invitations into a relationship with Mary that could lead to profound peace and healing.

Finally, Solanus's moral and pastoral authority played a significant role in the effectiveness of his referrals. His humility, kindness, and genuine concern for others earned him the trust of those he served. People felt safe in his presence, knowing that his guidance came from a place of sincere love and wisdom. This trust was particularly important for those

unfamiliar with or hesitant about Marian devotion. Even individuals like the Christian Scientist and the Lutheran woman he counseled were able to receive his recommendations because of the credibility he carried as a pastoral caregiver.

Taken together, these principles reveal why Solanus's Marian referrals were so effective. He approached each care-seeker with intentionality, trust, and humility, ensuring that his guidance was both meaningful and personal. For today's pastoral caregivers, Solanus offers a powerful reminder: referrals, when made with thoughtfulness and authenticity, can be a profound act of love that draws others closer to the heart of God.

Takeaways: Integrating Personal Devotion and Pastoral Care

Blessed Solanus Casey's example invites each of us—whether we are formal caregivers or simply people trying to support one another—to integrate personal devotion and care for others in a way that is authentic and meaningful. Our love for God and our lived theology can be connected; as we have seen, Solanus's own theology is both "pastoral in nature and based upon a profound sense of a loving relationship."[34] One of the most striking lessons from his life is his willingness to entrust both his own needs and those of others to Mary. Solanus believed deeply in Mary's maternal care and never hesitated to recommend her intercession, even to those who were not Catholic, as long as he believed they were open to it. His example shows us that genuine faith, combined with love and humility, can profoundly impact those we encounter.

For the everyday reader, this means being open to turning to Mary in your own life, entrusting your struggles and hopes to her intercession. Just as importantly, it means being willing to encourage others to do the same—provided you approach them with sincerity, genuine care, and respect for where they are on their spiritual journey. Solanus's referrals to Mary were

[34] Leo Wollenweber, "Introduction," in *God Bless You and Yours: Letters from Solanus Casey, OFM Cap.*, ed. Bernardine Casey (Detroit, MI: Father Solanus Guild, 2000), vii.

never thoughtless or dismissive; they were intentional acts rooted in his personal trust and experience of her care. His life demonstrates that spiritual resources, like Mary's intercession, are not only for us but are also gifts we can share with others.

Solanus's example also reminds us that personal devotion and care for others do not have to exist in separate, compartmentalized spaces. Instead, he shows us how our faith can inform and enrich the way we love and support those around us. Whether it's through prayer, a kind word, or a gentle recommendation to seek help from spiritual resources, we can give from what we have, trusting that God will use it to bring healing and peace. Like Solanus, we can be conduits of grace, pointing others to the love of God with the same humility and faith that characterized his life.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how Blessed Solanus Casey's practice of Marian referral exemplifies a model of pastoral care that integrates personal devotion and thoughtful accompaniment. Solanus's deep trust in Mary, his intentional preparation of care-seekers, and his humility in pointing beyond himself to God's grace offer a powerful lesson for caregivers and the faithful alike. By following his example, we are reminded that entrusting others to Mary and sharing the resources of our faith can be a profound act of love that brings people closer to the heart of God.[35]

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