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THE TROUBLED AFTERLIFE OF FR. PAUL OF MOLL[1]

Alkuin Schachenmayr, O.Cist.

Veneration for Fr. Paul of Moll (Franz Luyckx), O.S.B., has persisted for a good 150 years, although no beatification proceedings have been opened for him, and his home abbey Dendermonde (Belgium) does not mention him on its homepage. Many have expressed the desire for a critical biography over the generations, but one has never materialized.[2] Quotations from Fr. Paul of Moll can be politically awkward and are apt to be received controversially, and some consider those who propagate his legacy to be a somewhat questionable clientele. The fantastic aspect of some of the reported miracles attributed to his intercession led Fr. Alfons Zimmermann, O.S.B., to call Moll's penitential spirit "completely unmodern"—that was in 1933.[3] However, veneration of Fr. Paul of Moll continues unabated, not least because of his strong connection with the Medal of St. Benedict and the souls in purgatory.[4]

Moll was born on March 7, 1824 in Millighem-Moll, in the northeast of Belgium.[5] His parents were farmers. After attending high school in Gelb (Geel), he entered the novitiate in Dendermonde (Termonde) on August 24, 1848. The monastery, today in the Flemish-Dutch Province of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation, had existed only since 1837. Moll was ordained to the priesthood in Parma on

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[1] An earlier German version of this article appeared in *Erbe und Auftrag* 100, no. 1 (2024), 93–96.

[2] Arthur Preuss, "Book Review," *The Fortnightly Review* 21, no. 2 (1914): 60; Stephan Kainz, "Ein Wundertäter des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige* 37 NF 6 (1916): 447–449.

[3] Alfons Zimmermann, "P. Paul (Luyckx) von Moll," *Kalendarium Benedictinum* (1933) 1:250; for Moll as superior in Steenbrügge, but not abbot, see Stephan Kainz, "P. Paul von Moll, der Pförtner des hl. Benediktus," *Benediktus-Bote* 5, no. 6 (1931): 163–168, at 165.

[4] François Dupas, "Père Paul de Moll: pourquoi l'Eglise reste silencieuse devant tant de prodiges," 2023, www.infocatho.fr/pere-paul-de-moll-pourquoi-leglise-reste-silencieuse-devant-tant-de-prodiges/.

[5] The date of birth varies in the literature; Van Speybrouck writes January 15, but Desmyter writes March 7. Justinus Desmyter, *Aus Liebe von Jesus: Ein Lebensbild von Pater Paulus Luyckx O.S.B. (1824–1896)* [a précis of the Flemish edition printed by Sint-Pieters-en-Paulusabdij, Dendermonde 1984], German trans. Paul R. Audehm (Frankfurt: Edition Dagmar-Silvia Audehm, 1986), 3.

November 21, 1858, ten years after receiving the habit.[6] He spent the last year of his theological studies in Parma because the political situation in Belgium was uncertain. These circumstances and his poor health are given as reasons for the relatively long period of training he required before ordination. Moll claimed that he was cured of his illness as the result of a vision of Mary, Joseph, and Benedict. In 1869, he was sent to Afflighem[7] as a founding monk and remained there for a year; then he returned to Dendermonde. From 1879 to 1887 he was a founding monk of Steenbrugge.[8] In many sources he is erroneously identified as the founding abbot of that abbey.[9] From 1887 until his death on February 24, 1896, he worked in Dendermonde, among other things, shouldering the responsibility of treasurer and serving as his community's delegate to the provincial chapter.[10]

Admirers see in Moll a Belgian Benedictine version of the Curé of Ars; others compare him with Padre Pio.[11] He became known in Western Europe and North America as a thaumaturge, a gifted confessor, an epistolary spiritual counselor, and even a prophet of purgatory. The Medal of St. Benedict was a main pillar of his thoroughly traditional piety. Criticism from and tensions among confreres are a recurring theme in accounts of Moll's life, most of which are written in a hagiographic style. Especially the monastic foundations in Afflighem[12] and Steenbrugge[13] are said to have been characterized by slander and disparagement.

Veneration of Moll continues to this day; people often pray at his grave.[14] When asked for information, the Abbey of Dendermonde sends out a hagiographic booklet about him written by Fr. Justinus Desmyter, O.S.B., and published in 1984. Thus they promote the veneration of their deceased confrere, which has also spread to the Internet, but not on their website. Small statues of Moll are for sale online. There is talk of his memorial day on various sites and of a beatification

[6] Renat van Hecke, *Pater Paul von Moll* (Dendermonde: Abtei St. Peter und Paul, 1958), 14.

[7] Originally founded in the eleventh century, Affligem Abbey was re-established in 1869. Today it is a member of the Flemish Province of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation.

[8] The abbey, on the outskirts of Bruges, is today part of the Flemish Province of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation; Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 6–7.

[9] Zimmermann, "P. Paul (Luyckx) von Moll."

[10] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 11.

[11] Huillam Daverec, "Der belgische Padre Pio: Vater Paul Luyckx de Moll von Tausenden von Wundern," 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25QLA5V5Nos&ab_channel=HuillamDaverec.

[12] Agnes Gasperschitz, *Pater Paul von Moll* (Munich: Kanisiuswerk, 1929), 15.

[13] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, [10–]11.

[14] Abbot Gerard van Malderen, e-mail to author, Sept. 15, 2023.

process—but neither of these exists.[15] Where does this contradictory attitude, oscillating between veneration and silence, come from?

THE FAR-REACHING RECEPTION OF A BOOK

Although Moll was already popular in Belgium during his lifetime, his international reputation was made incomparably greater after his death as the result of a widely read work put together by Édouard van Speybrouck. The compiler was a contemporary and admirer of Moll's and translated an anonymously written book about the priest from Flemish into French, titling it: *Un thaumaturge au XIXe siècle. Quelques traits de la vie du très révérend père Paul de Moll, bénédictin (1824–1896)* (A Miracle Worker in the Nineteenth Century. Some Features of the Life of [...]). It is a collection of texts that served as the basis for numerous other versions, translations, excerpts, and pamphlets.[16] A seventh edition of the French version was published by Editions Résiac in 2015.

Édouard van Speybrouck's collection of texts about Moll was also translated into English twice.[17] A Dutch version had reached its third edition (St. Catherine Publishers, Brügge) in 1925; it was also derived from Speybrouck. Further translations, not cataloged so far, are certain to exist.

The German translation was done, surprisingly, by a diocesan priest working in North America. Camille Delaux (1870–1939) served the parish of New Milton, West Virginia, around 1910.[18] The translator was born in the German-speaking Alsace region of France and had emigrated to West Virginia in 1900, becoming an American citizen in 1905.[19] He was also the author of devotional pamphlets and Catholic

[15] Joachim Schäfer, "Paul von Moll," 2022, https://www.heiligenlexikon.de/BiographienP/Paul_von_Moll.html.

[16] Editions printed in 1898, 1921, 1931, and 2015; further editions are likely. The second edition of one of the English translations is online at https://archive.org/details/veryrevfatherpau0000edwa_ed2/page/n9/mode/2up. *The Very Rev. Father Paul of Moll: A Flemish Benedictine and Wonder-Worker of the Nineteenth Century* (Clyde, MO: Benedictine Convent, 1914).

[17] "[...] we believe two English translations have already appeared, one by Dom Nolan of Erdington Abbey [...]." Arthur Preuss, "Book review," *The Fortnightly Review* 21, no. 2 (1914): 60. The other was by Ephrem Hetzinger, a monk of St. Mary's Abbey, Newark, NJ. See Oliver Kapsner, *A Benedictine Bibliography* (Collegeville, MN: St. John's Abbey Press, 1962) 2:367.

[18] Self-published in 1910, later in Bolchen in Lothringen: Louis Stenger, 1913, 1917, 1918, 1925, 1930. "Aus der Bücherwelt," *Amerika* (St. Louis, MO), Oct. 2, 1910, 4–5.

[19] Passport Application, Oct. 4, 1917, Roll 67901–68200; Ancestry.com. Cardinal Gibbons ordained Delaux to the priesthood in Baltimore on June 21, 1902; Jon-Erik Gilot, Wheeling Archives, e-mail to author, Oct. 23, 2023.

biographies. In the case of the book on Moll, he not only translated it, but also took care of shipping the German version of the book to customers in North America.[20] His was a diaspora parish in the Diocese of Wheeling; he also served two mission stations.[21] Internationally, the publication awakened "a tremendous trust in the intercession of Father Paul."[22] Delaux's translation was not only distributed to readers of German in the U.S.A., but also among those in Europe, prompting a Benedictine reviewer to write, twenty years later, that Delaux's book had made a "triumphant march through the German lands."[23]

In 1932, the Tirolean *Canisiuswerk* dedicated a number of its series *Kleine Lebensbilder* (Small Portraits) to the late Moll. This put him in good bibliographical company, since the volume before his was dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo. After the Moll booklet, the series went on with books on Pope St. Pius X and St. Francis of Assisi, to name a few. The booklet about Moll,[24] written by the Austrian Agnes Gasperschitz, reached at least five editions and 15,000 copies. Gasperschitz was a writer of devotional works (mainly poems and serial novels), but she was not specialized in Benedictine spirituality. How adventurous such translations of translations can be is shown in the preface to her booklet; Gasperschitz confuses the name of the American priest Delaux with his place of residence, namely the remote village of New Milton in West Virginia. The result was: "Rev. New Milton published the first German translation."[25]

Another abridged version of Speybrouck's work was published in 1949 by Fr. Odo Staudinger, O.S.B.[26] and then expanded by Fr. Benedikt Stolz, O.S.B. These abridgments of what is basically a collection of quotations are typical of books about Moll; they have no value as historical sources or reliable factual accounts. For many, this was not a problem. Stolz's book, whose title referred to Moll as "the Singer of Divine Love and a Great Helper in Times of Need," reached a large readership.[27] Stolz himself felt indebted to Moll, he explained

[20] *America: A Catholic Review of the Week* 10, no. 4 (Nov. 1, 1913): 92.

[21] "St. Clare," *The Catholic Church in the United States of America* (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1914), 3:190.

[22] Kainz, "Ein Wundertäter," 449.

[23] Kainz, "Pförtner," 164.

[24] Gasperschitz, *Pater Paul*.

[25] Gasperschitz, *Pater Paul*, 5.

[26] Odo Staudinger, *P. Paul von Moll O.S.B.: der Sänger der göttlichen Liebe und große Nothelfer* (Wels, Austria: Franz Reisinger, 1949 and 1950); also published serially in *Benediktus-Bote*.

[27] Benedikt Stolz, *Pater Paul von Moll O.S.B.: der Sänger der göttlichen Liebe und großer Nothelfer* (Wels, Austria: Franz Reisinger, 1967 and 1979).

in his preface, since he was convinced that he had been helped by the intercession of the Dendermonde ascetic.[28] Staudinger's version, in turn, revived twice as a sequel in the *Benediktus-Bote* (Messenger of St. Benedict), once after World War II and the second time in 1975.[29]

In 1986 there appeared again a German translation of texts from a new collection of Moll quotations which had been published in Flemish in 1983. It was not really new, since this time it was Fr. Justinus Desmyter who had excerpted Speybrouck's work. The booklet is as official as it is provisional, as the grammatically questionable title *Aus Liebe von Jesus* (For Love of Jesus, but idiomatically incorrect) indicates. The booklet of 23 pages includes a statement of ecclesiastical permission and was printed by a Frankfurt publishing house, but its layout is the work of an amateur. It was written with a typewriter and has gaps in the page sequence. Perhaps tellingly, page 10, where the "suspicions and calumnies"[30] were supposedly mentioned, is missing. Again, numerous passages from the Speybrouck collection appear.[31]

THE SPIRITUALITY MOLL PROMOTED

Fr. Paul of Moll called himself "St. Benedict's gatekeeper."[32] This expression perhaps refers to his oft-mentioned mediation between heaven and earth. "Demand of me what you will," was one of the Flemish monk's favorite statements.[33] Another aspect of the porter's profile could be his role as a mediator in devotions to the Benedictine medal. Mary and Benedict are the two saints he mentioned most often. Confession, humility, and purgatory are other watchwords in his teaching. Moll is said to have had knowledge of a penitent's sins before the penitent confessed them. One witness reported that he had seen the priest-monk transfigured, floating above the ground, as he administered Holy Communion.[34] Numerous healings of physical and spiritual ailments were attributed to him.

[28] Stolz, *Pater Paul*, 6.
[29] *Benediktus-Bote* 18 (1947/1948) and 45 (1975).
[30] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 11.
[31] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 19–20.
[32] Kainz, "Pförtner," 166.
[33] Edouard van Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge und wunderbare Begebenheiten aus dem Leben des Benediktinermönches Pater Paul von Moll (1824–1896); ein Wundertäter des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, transl. Camille Delaux (Bolchen in Lothringen: Stenger, 1913), 12.
[34] Stolz, *Pater Paul*, 35–36.

Saint Benedict Medal

Moll was committed to increasing devotions to the Medal of St. Benedict. This devotional object, which first appears in historical documentation in 1647, became known widely in Catholic circles in the early modern period and went on to become a ubiquitous form of piety in the environment of Benedictine abbeys, their schools, and their pastoral works. Moll's contemporary connection to the medal could lie in the jubilee celebrations of St. Benedict's 1400th birthday in 1880, or in the reception of Prosper Guéranger's 1862 publication on the history of the medal.[35]

To show the medal's supernatural power, Fr. Paul affirmed that one medal was sufficient to put out a fire. To others, he recommended putting it in fields to protect them against vermin. Such advice, coming from Speybrouck's collection of quotations, leaked over into various small writings, yet they rarely reached the Internet.[36] For today's readers, such practical applications of the medal sound strange, particularly when Moll recommends placing it "in the walls of new buildings" to prevent their collapse.[37] It should be noted, however, that even in the twentieth century St. Teresa of Calcutta vividly testified to similar boundless confidence in the Miraculous Medal from the Rue du Bac.[38]

The expectation (and occurrence) of miracles, however, appears more frequently in reports of Fr. Paul than in those about Mother Teresa. A North American review of one of the numerous editions of Speybrouck's book notes Moll's unusual success as a miracle worker, describes him erroneously as an abbot, and praises his witness for a different existential plane. His was a "life in which the miraculous, if we may use this term, was almost part of everyday life."[39] Therefore the reviewer recommends the work for its sense of awe and wonder, even if he doubts some of the reported miracles.

[35] Fidelis Busam, "Die St. Benediktusmedaille," *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige* 24 (1903): 82–92.

[36] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 62; Gasperschitz, *Pater Paul*, 46.

[37] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 150.

[38] Leo Maasburg, *Mother Teresa of Calcutta: A Personal Portrait* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2015), 23, 151.

[39] "Book Review," *America; A Catholic Review of the Week* 10, no. 4 (Nov. 1, 1913): 92.

A letter by Anatole de Ségur (1823–1902), printed in the Paris newspaper *L'Univers* three years after Moll's death, serves in Speybrouck's book as a kind of preface. Ségur did not know the Benedictine priest, but joins in the choir of his admirers, even comparing him to St. Francis of Assisi. Such praise from Ségur, whose son Pierre was at that time (1907) gaining fame as a member of the Académie Française, places Moll in the context of the Catholic conservative camp in turn-of-the-century France.[40] Moll's anti-socialist statements, which also circulate on the Internet today, deepen the impression of a cleric with pronounced political views: "The liberals are the devil's black artists," he once said.[41] Or: "People complain about socialism. But it will spread far more and that is because the Blessed Sacrament is not venerated enough."[42] Father Paul claimed to be unable to help a blind woman in Antwerp because she had sold "liberal" newspapers in her shop.[43] He made a kind of commitment to political Catholicism: "The liberal party is over. There are only two parties left: the Catholics and the Socialists."[44] In Speybrouck's collection of minor quotations, at least one is anti-Semitic: "The Jews have their paradise, it is here on earth."[45]

Moll was also praised in popular, more marginal publications in the late twentieth century. His biography is recommended to readers in the following three publications: F. X. Schouppe, *Purgatory: Explained by the Lives and Legends of the Saints* (TAN Books, 1994); Emmett Culligan, *The Last World War and the End of Time* (TAN Books, 1981); and in a book by Catholic anti-Semite and conspiracy theorist Robin De Ruiter, *The 13 Satanic Bloodlines* (self-published, 2000). One of the most extensive collections of quotations from Moll on the Internet can be found on the homepage of the traditionalist Benedictine community at Reichenstein Monastery, which maintains close ties to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X.[46] These advertisements

[40] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 17–26.
[41] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 151.
[42] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 151.
[43] "Father Paul, Benedictine Monk of the Abbey of Termonde, in Flanders or The Wonder-worker of the 19th Century," *Tabernacle and Purgatory* 3, no. 6 (March 1908): 176–190, at 189.
[44] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 151.
[45] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 151.
[46] https://kloster-reichenstein.de/01/2013/2013-02-20-Moll.html; for the the Abbey of Reichenstein, their mother abbey Bellaigue in France, and the Fraternity of St. Pius X, see https://fsspx.asia/en/news/inauguration-new-benedictine-monastery-17758.

for books on Moll show who is reading him more than a hundred years later. It is not so much Moll's person who is being venerated, but his rhetorical formulations, yet these in turn have no documented origin, since they have wandered through multiple layers of translation.

VENERATION FOR MOLL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Even the hagiographic sources state that Moll was "often a sign of contradiction."[47] On the one hand, this comment refers to tensions during the founding of the monasteries, but a cautious observer might suspect other problems, as well. In any case, the steady flow of visitors to Moll's grave after his death in 1896 remained a fact. In 1970, Moll's remains were even transferred to the abbey church of Dendermonde. A photograph of the old gravestone, completely covered with ex-voto panels, is often printed in pamphlets about Moll, e.g. in the official booklet Desmyter published in 1983.[48] Perhaps the longest collected corpus of answers to prayers is to be found in the Salzburg-based magazine, *Benediktus-Bote*. The editor of this magazine was Fr. Odo Staudinger, O.S.B., who clearly identified the reports of answered prayers as private revelations. He published such reports in the *Bote* for decades.[49] Desmyter's book extends the list of reported miracles chronologically, continuing up to the year 1983.[50]

The Internet age has seen continued veneration for Moll in its own manner: on the homepage of the Capuchin Church of St. Anthony in Bregenz (Austria), Moll is listed under the heading "Saints." The text claims: "The number of those who found help with Fr. Paul is estimated to be over one million. Even after his death, prayers were answered and miracles occurred and still occur today."[51] Huillam Daverec's YouTube video, uploaded on February 25, 2023, received 126,608 views in five months and recorded 403 mostly enthusiastic comments. The video appears to have been a private initiative.[52]

[47] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 14.

[48] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 12.

[49] Random samples from the collected volumes of *Benediktus-Bote* show the following references to answered prayers: 3, no. 11 (1929): 347–348; 5, no. 6 (1931): 168 and 191; 13, no. 4 (1939): 109–110; 28, no. 3 (1958): 72; 36, no. 3 (1965): 70; 45, no. 7 (1975): 164; see also the illustrations on 149.

[50] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 22.

[51] "Pater Paul von Moll—Ich gewähre dir alles [...]," 2021, https://www.st-antonius.at/antonius/?s=Paul+von+Moll.

[52] Daverec, "Der belgische Padre Pio."

Seen against this background, Moll might have become a kind of Valentin Paquay (1828–1905), also known as "the Belgian Vianney" and beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2003.[53] However, some stumbling blocks may have prevented Moll's path to canonization before such a procedure could even begin.

Fr. Stephan Kainz, O.S.B., of Scheyern Abbey in Bavaria, reviewed Speybrouck's book on Moll in 1916 and drew attention to the fact that although it was the most widely circulated publication on Fr. Paul of Moll, it had been neither written nor translated by the celebrated monk, and that when Moll's body was exhumed on July 24, 1899, no monk of Dendermonde was present, nor was any cleric of the Diocese of Ghent there. Both the abbot and the bishop, according to Kainz, had objected to Speybrouck's publication. Thus—according to Kainz—it belonged to the category of forbidden books.[54] Kainz insisted that it was "high time to publish" an ecclesiastically approved biography of Moll. None ever appeared.

The editors of pious periodicals, such as *Der Christliche Kinderfreund* (The Christian Children's Friend, Innsbruck) and the *Elisabeth-Blatt* (St. Elisabeth Journal, Linz), heeded Kainz's warnings and printed warnings about Speybrouck's book in 1917 and 1918. Readers were informed about the lack of approbation and reportedly unreliable miracle reports. But a look abroad would have reassured them: several other translations had been approved in proper form. The 1910 American translation had a *nihil obstat* from Abbot Frowin Conrad of Conception Abbey, Missouri and the *imprimatur* of Bishop Maurice Francis Burke of St. Joseph, Missouri.[55] These were qualified censors: Conrad had been librarian and novice master in Engelberg, Switzerland, before leaving for the American missions. Bishop Burke was president of the American Dante Society.

Fifteen years later, however, Kainz had thoroughly reconsidered his criticism and retracted it.[56] In a 1931 essay, he took a consistently laudatory and admiring attitude toward Moll, affirming that devotions at the confessor's grave had only increased and that Moll had indeed been a Belgian Curé d'Ars whose apostolate was characterized by hearing confessions, blessing medals, and encouraging Marian devotions. "As one goes to Konnersreuth nowadays," wrote Kainz,

[53] "Seligsprechung eines Belgiers," *Das Vaterland* (Vienna), Jan. 5, 1908, 9, https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=vtl&datum=19080105&seite=9&zoom=33.

[54] Kainz, "Ein Wundertäter," 448–449.

[55] *The Very Rev. Father Paul of Moll*, copyright page.

[56] Kainz, "Pförtner," 163–168.

referring to the home of the well-known German mystic and stigmatic Therese Neumann (1898–1962), "so one hurried to Termonde at that time to Father Paul."[57]

Criticism of Moll was unable to stunt the rising number of his admirers: Delaux's book was distributed unchecked by Catholic publishers, even after Kainz's warnings in 1916. Newspaper advertisements for many subsequent editions confirm the demand, as do recurring references to the book in the Catholic press. A biography published by the *Canisiuswerk* was given the *nihil obstat* in 1932 in the Swiss city of Freiburg.[58] For Stolz's booklet, it was the abbot of Dormition Abbey, Leo Rudloff, who granted the *imprimi potest*.[59] In 1958, the Abbey of Dendermonde published a new hagiographic booklet with numerous ecclesiastical stamps of approval, and with brand-new reports of healings. The editor of the *Benediktus-Bote* wrote a preface for it in which he explained that he received reports of miraculous healings through Moll's intercession on a weekly basis.[60]

Since the hour of Moll's death in 1896, there had been talk of his body being incorrupt. Eyewitnesses at the deathbed had reported an odor of sanctity emanating from the corpse. The grave was opened July 24, 1899.[61] The body was supposedly exhumed with the permission of civic authorities, but with no ecclesiastical authorities present. Among those present, however, was Moll's biographer and admirer Édouard Speybrouck, with family.[62] Kainz portrayed this excavation as questionable in his 1916 article because no superiors had been there, yet the transferal of bones to the abbey church of Dendermonde, which took place in 1970, was certainly a confirmation of strong public veneration. On the other hand, it dashed the hopes of those expecting to find an incorrupt body. Moll's face was no longer recognizable, even if the hands had been incorrupt.[63]

There is still no official interest in getting Fr. Paul of Moll beatified. The quotations attributed to him are characterized by a sharpness that contradicts the odor of sanctity. "I have everything directly from our dear Lord";[64] "I am always in contact with our Savior

[57] Kainz, "Pförtner," 165–166.
[58] Gasperschitz, *Pater Paul*, 4.
[59] Stolz, *Pater Paul*, 2.
[60] Van Hecke, *Pater Paul*, 54.
[61] Kainz, "Pförtner," 164.
[62] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 89–93.
[63] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 12.
[64] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 167.

and it is he himself who dictates what I say."[65] Rather too detailed facts about purgatory come to light: "The poor souls in purgatory hear the quarrels of their family members on earth, and this increases their sufferings."[66] He bragged about recruiting novices in the confessional: "I have brought at least a hundred religious into the monastery—and no one has left yet."[67] A problematic Mariology is also evident: "On each of her feast days, the Mother of God appears in purgatory, liberating numerous souls and consoling all the others."[68] For today's readers, his manner of venerating the Medal of St. Benedict is inaccessible: "I never forget to dip a Medal of St. Benedict into my medicine before I take it."[69]

CONCLUSION

Paul of Moll ranks high amid the small number of Benedictine mystics and spiritual fathers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His role is especially pronounced when it comes to the recent history of the Medal of St. Benedict. As a Flemish Benedictine, his confreres entrusted him with administrative duties that required a high degree of reliability and probity. His pastoral efforts in the confessional and as a spiritual director left a mark on many and remain a legacy to this day. Because he spoke the relatively obscure language of Flemish and did not publish any writings, statements attributed to him in countless international publications always depend on intermediaries. An accurate or ultimate assessment of his person remains difficult. First, Paul of Moll is inaccessible to most admirers because they do not speak his native language. Second, there are certain gaps in the record of his theological thinking, because his writing was not handed down with theological expertise, but mainly by Speybrouck, who was not theologically competent. And thirdly, it is in his political pronouncements—if they were really his at all—that Moll loses the most credibility. Nevertheless, Moll retains his place among the reputed miracle-working confessors and ascetics of modernity. There will always be a certain amount of opposition to this group of religious originals—just as a certain fascination emanates from them.

[65] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 168.
[66] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 140.
[67] Desmyter, *Aus Liebe*, 9.
[68] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 143.
[69] Speybrouck, *Charakterzüge*, 157.