



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 28



Marian devotions are those prayers and acts undertaken to honor Mary and with the intent of seeking her intercession with her Son, Jesus, and his Father. Devotion to the Virgin Mary does not, however, amount to worship - which is reserved for God alone. Catholics view Mary as subordinate to Christ, but uniquely so, in that she is seen as above all other creatures. In 787 the Second Council of Nicaea affirmed a three-level hierarchy of *latria*, *hyperdulia* and *dulia* that applies to God, the Virgin Mary and then to the other saints.

The Roman Catholic Church holds many teachings associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Four of these specific doctrines have been raised to the level of dogma, meaning in technical terms that they must be held by the faithful as essential to participation as Roman Catholics. The four Marian dogmas have been defined by the magisterium over the course of Christian history, using both Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the two elements of the one source of Revelation, as evidence for these proclamations. These four dogmas are: Mary the Mother of God, Perpetual Virginity of Mary, The Immaculate Conception, and The Assumption of Mary into Heaven. The twentieth-century has seen a significant drive to establish a fifth and final Dogma-Mary as Co-Redemptrix.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Chapter 28

Appendix: Discernment of Spirits

Since there is today so great a number of alleged apparitions of Our Lady, and since so many become so attached to them as to almost center their spiritual lives about them, it is good to consider some principles about visions and revelations.

First, these things are definitely not part of the core of the spiritual life. St. John of the Cross, the Mystical Doctor, is very hard on these things. He goes so far as to tell souls that if a vision comes, they should at first not accept, to hold off and consider its authenticity only if it comes again. The reason he gives is this: faith holds on without seeing proof; those who want visions want to see, not to believe without seeing (cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Spiritual Life II*, 575-88 and Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 299-399).

We distinguish two kinds of actions by the local bishops of places of alleged apparitions: 1) a decision that it is or is not authentic. Since the Church herself has no providential protection in the area of private revelations, he could be in error. We are not obliged to believe him, or even the Pope himself in such a case. 2) an order to all not to go in pilgrimage to the place of the supposed visions. This is a different matter, it is an exercise of authority, which the local bishop does have. Therefore if there are violations of this order, and yet visions seem to continue, we maybe absolutely certain that the visions are false. Our Lady or the Saints will never appear to promote disobedience. Even if there seem to be benefits to the devotion of people, we must still obey. And we need to recall how demanding the Church is of proof for alleged miracles. At Lourdes, after thousands of seeming miracles, the Church has checked and approved only a little over 60 cases since the start of that shrine.

The objection will be raised: The Church was so slow in approving Fatima, and so people lost so many graces while waiting. We reply: They lost nothing at all. Visions are not like sacraments that produce their effect by their own power in those who do not place an obstacle. One of the most approved series of visions are those of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary. On one occasion, He had told her to do something, but her Superior did not approve. When He came again, she asked Him about this, and He replied: "Therefore not only do I desire that you should do what your Superior commands, but also that you should do nothing of all that I order without their consent. I love obedience, and without it no one can please me." (Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary §47). We can understand this: He Himself redeemed the world precisely by obedience (Cf. Rom 5:19). Without obedience His sacrifice would have been empty externalism, the kind God reproved in the ancient Jews in Isaiah 29:13: "This people honors me with their lips, but heir heart is far from me." Lumen Gentium (LG) §3 says "by His obedience He brought about redemption." So there is no grace to be had by disobeying. To wait will not entail any loss at all, rather, God's favor will be upon those who obey.

If the local bishop does not approve, it is not good to say: let us wait for Rome to speak. Normally Rome respects the local bishop, and is highly unlikely to reverse his decision. Even if Rome did reverse it, we would have no guarantee, for, as we said, the providential protection promised to the Church does not cover private revelations.

So let us examine some of the principles for discernment of spirits. What kind of Spirit is at work when someone receives a vision, a revelation, or a more routine favor? To determine this is called the discernment of spirits. It is of great importance to find the right answer. It is evident that there can be three sources: good spirit, evil spirit, and autosuggestion.

The Fathers of the Church asked a related question about the appearances of God in the Old Testament (OT).

The Fathers thought it was always the Divine Logos, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who appeared. Cf. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (John Knox. Atlanta 2d ed. 1975 I. p. 103) commenting on Justin Apology 1. 46: "In his view, the incarnation is merely the conclusion in an immense series of manifestations of the Logos, which had their beginning in the creation of the world." (But DS 800 defined: all works outside divine nature are common to all Three.)

Behind this view seems to be the idea that the Father was too transcendent to appear in the world, and so He needed the Logos as a bridge to mankind. Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 127: "He is not moved nor can be contained by place or by the whole world, for He existed before the world was made. How then could He talk to anyone, or be seen by anyone, or appear on the smallest portion of the earth, when the people at Sinai were not able to look even on the glory of him [Moses] who as sent from him?" So the Mediator is the Logos. Question, *Pathology* I. p. 208 thinks, "Justin denies the substantial omnipresence of God." Not so. Quasten's translation of the Greek was poor at one point, where he said: "He is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world". It should be as above instead.

Also, Quasten thinks, p. 209, that "Justin tends to subordinationism.... This is evident from Apology 2, 6: 'His Son who alone is properly called Son, the Logos, who alone was with him and was begotten before the works, when at first he created and arranged all things by him, is called Christ, in reference to his being anointed and God's ordering all things through him.' " This does not prove any subordination.— Justin is groping. He wants to say the Father is transcendent (*arretos*) but that He employs the Son as Mediator. But we need to carefully observe a point of theological method. We at times find two truths, which seem to clash, and even after checking, we see both are established. Then we must hold both, until we find how to reconcile them (cf. the case of the two sets of statements by the Fathers on the knowledge of Christ (in Wm. G. Most, *The Consciousness of Christ*), and on membership in the Church (In the appendix, *Our Father's Plan*). Justin did not find how to reconcile the truths. Nor did various other Fathers who spoke similarly.

Thus Origen has been both accused and acquitted of subordinationism: Quasten II. 77: "that he teaches subordinationism has been both affirmed and denied; St. Jerome does not hesitate to accuse him of doing so, while Gregory Thaumaturgos and St. Athanasius clear him of all suspicion. Modern authors like Régnon and Prat also acquit him."—There are two kinds of statements in Origen:

(a) Affirms divinity: In Hebr. Frg. 24, 359: "Thus Wisdom too, since it proceeds from God, is generated out of the divine substance itself, under the figure of a bodily outflow. Nevertheless, it, too, is thus called 'a sort of clean and pure outflow of omnipotent glory' (Wisd. 7, 25). Both these similes manifestly show the community of

them. They, unlike the successive, may come even when one is distracted: thus the exterior origin is known. Illusion by the devil is possible here.

C) Substantial: Same as formal, but they produce in the soul the effects they signify, e.g. , if God says to the soul: be quiet, be humble. Royo Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 821 , thinks no illusion is possible in such a case.

Note: 1) These locutions and visions belong to the category of *gratiae gratis datae* or charismatic, and per se are not necessary for spiritual growth of the soul, even though per accidens they may aid it. They do not even prove a soul is in the state of grace: cf. Mt 7. 22-23. But one should not desire these—danger of self-deception or devilish deception. St. Teresa of Avila warns (*Interior Castle* 6. 9), cited above, warns of dangers.

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Such visions may come in sleep or while awake. May deal with things past or future as well as present. Cf. the case of the dreams of Joseph the patriarch. They may also be symbolic.

3) Intellectual visions: There is no sensory image present in these, the effect is directly supernatural on the intellect. There will be more clarity and force than what one would have from the natural powers. May come by way of ideas already acquired but coordinated or modified by God, or through infused ideas. The visions may be obscure, manifesting only the presence of the object, or they may be clear.

These intellectual visions may last a long time, days, weeks, even years. Cf. St. Teresa, Interior Castle 6. 8. 3. The effects may include profound understanding or love. They are apt to bring absolute certitude that they come from God: cf. St. Teresa, Life, 27. 5. Combinations: In the Damascus road instance, Paul saw with his eyes a sensory vision, with his imagination he saw Ananias coming to him, in his mind he understood God's will.

Three kinds of revelations:

(Preliminary: distinguish public, found in Scripture and Tradition, completed when last Apostle died and New Testament was finished. Cf. Dei Verbum § 4—and private revelations: all else).

1) Auricular: A sound is produced in the air by a good or evil spirit. They may seem to come from a vision.

2) Imaginary: This does not mean false, but rather, a locution not perceived by the ears but by the power of image making. May be received while asleep or awake, and may come from God or a good or bad angel. By the fruits produced in the soul—if one examines all fruits, not just some—one can see if the source is good or bad. Satan can afford to produce some seeming good fruits, if in the long run he can get evil results, such as disobedience to the Church over alleged visions, or pride, or may suggest great projects, beyond the ability of the soul, which will later give up all effort.

3) Intellectual: Impressed directly on the mind, with no images received in senses or imagination. There are three classes, according to St. John of the Cross—whom others follow (Ascent of Mt. Carmel II. 28-31): successive, formal, substantial.

A) Successive: These are formed by the soul, reasoning, with much facility, especially during meditation. They are the combined effect of the soul and the Holy Spirit. Illusion and error are quite possible here. St. John of Cross in II. 39. 4 says sometimes pure heresy can come in, created by the imagination of the soul or by the devil.

B) Formal: These seem to come from outside, whereas the successive seem to originate within the soul, even though the Holy Spirit may have a part in producing

substance between Son and Father. For an outflow seems homoousios, i.e., of one substance with the body of which it is the outflow or exhalation." (from Quasten, p. 78)

Discussion with Heraclides: "Origen said: We confess therefore two Gods?" (cited from Quasten II, p. 64)

(b) Seems to state subordination: On John 13. 25: "We say that the Savior and the Holy Spirit are without comparison and are very much superior to all things that are made, but also that the Father is even more above them than they are themselves above creatures even the highest." (from Quasten II, p. 79).

Comment: Origen says the Savior and Holy Spirit are "very much superior to all things that are made... [and] above creatures"—which seems to imply they are not made and are not creatures. It only affirms the Father is higher—probably means transcendence—again, the problem of theological method with two kinds of statements.

Really the discussions of the Fathers missed a basic point, which is now a defined doctrine: All the workings of the Three Divine Persons outside the Divine Nature are common to all three (DS 501, 3814).

So we turn to reports of private revelations in later ages.

Causes of illusions: Poulain, Graces of Interior Prayer, p. 322, thinks that at least three fourths of the revelations given to those who have not reached high sanctity are illusions. And there are many cases known of illusions even in canonized saints. So St. Teresa of Avila is quite prudent in warning that if one hears God is giving some souls such graces, one should never ask or desire Him to give such things. She gives several reasons: 1) The desire shows a lack of humility; 2) one thereby leaves self open to "great danger, since the devil needs only to see a door left slightly open to enter"; 3) there is the danger of autosuggestion; she says that if one has a great desire for something, he/she can easily persuade self that he/she is seeing or hearing what is desired. 4) It is presumptuous to want to choose one's own path: only the Lord knows what is best; 5) very heavy trials commonly go along with such favors; 6) it could even bring loss. She adds that many holy people have never had such a favor, while there are others who have had them and yet are not holy. "A person who gains the virtues at the cost of his own labor has earned much more merit." (Interior Castle. 6. 9).

St. John of Cross warns on accepting revelations. It is unfortunate to center our spiritual life about these—it may even weaken faith, by wanting to see, instead of believing. Cf. Ascent II. 11; III. 13, and Poulain, op. cit., pp. 299-399; Garrigou-Lagrange, Three Ages of the Spiritual Life II. 575-88.

We think also of the words of Our Lord (Jn 20:29): "More blessed are they who have not seen and have believed."

Five causes of error on revelations:

(1) Faulty interpretation of visions by the recipient.

St. John of the Cross warns on this in *Ascent II*. 19. Thus St. Joan of Arc in prison had a revelation that she would be delivered by a great victory—it was her martyrdom, which she did not suspect. St. Mechtilde was asked by St. Gertrude to pray that she would get docility and patience. St. Mechtilde reported what she thought our Lord had said, namely, that the word patience comes from *pax* and *scientia*, peace and knowledge. But this is a false etymology. She would have been right to take the words to mean that patience had its source in peace and knowledge.—St. Gertrude reported that on Easter our Lord explained the word *Alleluia*—saying that all vowels are in the word except *o*, which stands for grief. But *o* can express pleasure as well as grief.—St. Peter himself (Acts 10:9ff) did not understand the vision of the linen sheet until getting to see Cornelius.—Jonah did not understand that Nineveh would be spared if it repented—St. Norbert claimed a revelation that the Antichrist would come in his own generation.—St. Vincent Ferrer spent the last 21 years of his life preaching that the end was at hand. He even brought back to life for 15 minutes a dead woman, who confirmed his prediction. But the end did not happen. Probably it was averted by wholesale conversion by the Saint's preaching.

Prophecies of punishment, and promises of special favors should be considered as conditional. E.g., the Scapular promise should not be taken to refer to mere physical wearing of the Scapular: it must be, as Pius XII said, the outward sign of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that is really lived. If it is used this way then even if the vision of St. Simon Stock might not be true, the promise will be fulfilled, as we explained earlier.

2. Visions of the life and death of Christ, or other historic scenes, must be understood to be approximate only. Thus some saw Jesus with three nails, some with four. Catherine Emmerich thought Mary of Agreda took literally many pictures that should have been taken allegorically. This is true of visions of paradise, purgatory, or hell—the reality cannot be shown in any vision, so mere images are used, e.g. , in the Apocalypse.

Blessed Veronica of Binasco saw the whole life of Christ, and so did St. Frances of Rome and Catherine Emmerich. The Bollandists, Jesuit experts in studying the lives of the Saints, tell us there are many historical errors in these. Again, those of St. Mechtildis and St. Bridget disagree.

Impertinent things, darkness, restlessness in the soul, a bold, obstinate spirit, many indiscretions, pride, lack of hope, disobedience, vanity, self-satisfaction, impatience, rebellion of the passions, hypocrisy, pretense, attachment to earthly things, forgetfulness of Christ and of imitating him, a false charity including bitter zeal, indiscretion.

Supplement: Appearances compared to revelation

Either one, revelation or vision, may come without the other. There are three kinds of appearances:

1) Sensory or corporeal: The senses perceive a real object which is normally invisible. Need not be a real human body that is seen—may be a sensory or luminous form, or God or His agent may produce that image on the eyes of the one who sees the vision.

Note on Eucharistic visions: St. Thomas III. 76. 8 holds that Jesus does not appear in visible form in His real body since the Ascension. The appearances may come: (a) by His working on the exterior senses (usually when only one person sees the vision), so that there is nothing there in external reality. (b) There is something in external reality, but in the case of the Eucharist, there is a change in the figure, color etc. of the accidents of the Real Presence. (This is usual when more than one person sees or when the apparition continues and even is exhibited in a shrine).—St. Teresa of Avila, *Relations XV* (Peers edition I. pp. 341-42) seems to agree with St. Thomas: "From some of the things He said to me, I learned that, since ascending into the heavens, He had never come down to earth again to communicate Himself to anyone, except in the Most Holy Sacrament."—But others think there is a real presence, especially when He appears in proximity to the Sacred Host (cf. also the words cited above for St. Teresa), "except in the Most Holy Sacrament". When elsewhere, some think it is merely moral presence—others think there is a physical presence, and cite the case of St. Anthony kissing the Infant Jesus—a scene witnessed by the owner of the house where it happened: Cf. Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, pp. 315-16. On visions in general, cf. Poulain, pp. 301-02, and Royo Marin, *Teología de la Perfección Cristiana*, pp. 815-19, A. Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life*, pp. 701-02.

The same principles would apply to visions of the Blessed Virgin—and we note the varied images in which she appears.

2) Imaginative visions: produced in the imagination by God or angels or Saints, during sleep or when awake. Often an intellectual vision accompanies, which explains the meaning.—These can be produced in three ways: (1) Awakening of images already present in memory, (2) Supernatural combination of such images held in memory, (3) Newly infused images.—the devil can work in the first two ways , not in the third.

Yet, God has myriad ways to lead souls to Himself. So although some authors, e.g. , Garrigou-Lagrange, think that infused contemplation is a necessary feature of the growth of a soul, yet, at least the sweet forms of contemplation, seem not necessary. Here are some statements from St. Therese of Lisieux, and St. Francis de Sales, which seem to imply that aridity is the more normal state for many souls:

St. Therese of Lisieux, *Autobiography* (Cap 13, p. 196, Kenedy edition): "Do not think that I am overwhelmed with consolations. Far from it! My joy consists in being deprived of all joy here on earth. Jesus does not guide me openly: I neither see nor hear Him."

St. Therese of Lisieux, *Poem*: "I know that at Nazareth, Virgin full of graces/ You lived in great poverty, not wishing anything more; No raptures, no miracles, no ecstasies/ embellished your life, O Queen of the elect. / The number of little ones is very great upon the earth. / They can, without trembling, lift up their eyes to you. /It pleases you to walk among the common way, / Incomparable Mother, to guide them to the heavens."

St. Francis de Sales, *Letter 764 to St. Jane de Chantal*: "It is the height of holy disinterestedness to be content with naked, dry, and insensible acts carried out by the superior will alone. You have expressed your suffering well to me and there is nothing to do to remedy it but what you are doing: affirming to our Lord, sometimes aloud and sometimes in song, that you even will to live and to eat as the dead do, without taste, feeling or knowledge. In the end, the Savior wants us to be His so perfectly that nothing else remains for us, and to abandon ourselves entirely to the mercy of His providence without reservation."

2. For certain, it is not good to center one's spiritual life around apparitions especially those had by others. Growth in holiness consists essentially in the alignment of our will with the will of God. Somatic resonance develops gradually, and hence such progress is necessarily gradual, except in instances of great strain, when if one really does accept the will of God heartily, there can be a large advance, instead of the usual small advances. And we should remember, the divine presence in the tabernacle is beyond doubt real. And the Mass is greater than any alleged apparition. In this connection we recall too the strong words of St. John of the Cross saying that to wish to see is to go in the direction opposite to faith: "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed".

3. We might sum up characteristics thus: 1) Signs of the spirit of God: fits with teachings of the Church; serious; gives light to the soul, docility, discretion: no hurriedness or exaggerations; humble thoughts; confidence in God, rightness of intention, patience in suffering, self-denial, sincerity and simplicity in conduct, no attachments not even to the gifts, great desire to imitate Christ in all things (a very strong sign), gentleness, kindness; 2) Signs of the evil spirit: (the opposite of the above—spirit of falseness or lie, suggestion of useless things, curious things,

Pope John XXIII, ordered *The Poem of the Man God* put on the index, on Dec. 16, 1960. The Index is now abolished, but Cardinal Ratzinger in a letter of Jan 31, 1985 wrote:..."The Index of forbidden books keeps all of its moral authority and therefore the distribution and recommendation of the work is considered improper when its condemnation was not made lightly but with the most serious motivation of neutralizing the harm which such publication could inflict on the more unwary faithful." So the Pontifical Imprimatur claimed for it is bogus. The message of April 28, 1947 explains that the messages do not contradict Revelation 22.18: "with this work no addition was made to revelation, but only the gaps, brought about by natural causes and by supernatural will, were filled in." So the vision shows no understanding of Apocalyptic genre.

3. Human action may mingle with the divine action: St. Catherine Labouré foretold many events correctly, but failed on others. It is especially easy for this to happen with ideas that appeal to our own desires or fit with preconceived ideas. St. Colette thought St. Anne had married three times and had several daughters, so she thought St. Anne appeared to her with all this family. Benedict XIV (*Heroic Virtue III. 14. p. 404*) said: "The revelations of some holy women canonized by the Apostolic See whose saying and writings in rapture and derived from rapture are filled with errors."

St. Elizabeth of Schoenau had many revelations on historical subjects. Imprudently she begged her guardian angel to get more of this for her, especially on St. Ursula whose bones were just discovered. And she also told her community to pray urgently for 17 days for that. Yet the Bollandists said her visions are full of historical errors, even though she demanded they be published in her lifetime. The works of St. Hildegard contain many scientific errors, those prevalent in her day. Bl. Anna Maria Taigi predicted a great temporal triumph for the Church—but it did not come. She wrote on physics and medicine, with much error. St. Frances of Rome claims she saw in a vision that the sky was made of crystal—a belief common in her day. Mary of Agreda made the same error on a crystal sky. She thought the 6 days of creation were 24 hrs. each. She even said it was a sin not to believe her! So Pope Clement XIV, a Franciscan stopped the process of her beatification on account of her book. Even Dominican writers often reject the revelations of Alan de la Roche, though Alan said, "May I be accursed if I have departed from the way of truth."

Benedict XIV (*On Heroic Virtue III. 53. #16*) examines an ecstasy of 1377 of St. Catherine of Siena, in which the Blessed Virgin seems to deny the Immaculate Conception. Benedict quotes some authors who try to blame editors or directors. But it is very possibly her preconceived ideas—Dominican opposition to Immaculate Conception—that really caused the "vision".

4. A true revelation may later be altered involuntarily by the recipient. This happens especially with intellectual locutions which need to be translated into words. Again, God may seem to promise a cure without saying if it is total or partial, sudden or slow, or even physical or moral. Again if a revelation is received in an instant, but it takes long to write it all down. St. Bridget admits such a thing in her own case.

5. Secretaries may alter without intending to do so: The accuracy of the text is disputed in the works of Mary of Agreda, Catherine Emmerich, and Mary Lataste. It has been shown that 32 passages from the latter have been taken word for word from St. Thomas Summa.

Similarly, compilers sometimes modify them. The first edition of Catherine Emmerich had St. James the Elder present at the death of the Blessed Virgin. When it was seen that this was incompatible with Acts of Apostles, it was dropped from later editions.

Five Causes of False Revelations

1. Pure bad faith, fakery: Magdalen of the Cross was a Franciscan of Cordova, born in 1487, who entered a convent at age of 17. From the age of 5 the devil appeared to her as various Saints, led her to desire to be considered a saint. At 13 he said who he was, offered an agreement: he would spread her reputation for holiness, and give her at least 30 years of pleasures. She agreed, and it all came true—ecstasies, levitation, prophecies, simulated stigmata. At door of death she confessed. Exorcism was needed.

2. Over-active imagination: We said above that human faculties may mingle with the divine action. They may imagine a saint is near them. They may imagine intellectual locutions. Cf. St. John of Cross, Ascent II. 29. St. Teresa said (Interior Castle 6. 6) that if one has once had a real vision, they would recognize the deception.

Hallucinations can come from excess in abstinence, fasting, and vigils.

3. Illusion in thinking one remembers things that never happened: They may imagine they have had visions. Some invent stories and convince themselves—in good faith. Some relate trips to far lands where they have never been. The line between imagination and reality is dim in young children—something similar can happen later too. This is not rare. If a director finds his advice has little effect, there is reason for seeing illusion. Some make false charges in courts in this way.

4. Devil may give false visions or revelations. We saw the case of Magdalen of the Cross.

5. Predictions by falsifiers: Some make these at first for their own amusement, then find they have a tiger by the tail. St. Bonaventure (De profectu religiosorum III. 76) said he was fed up with such things, on the troubles of the Church and the end of the world. During the great Western Schism at end of 14th century, there were many

Rules of St. Ignatius

1. To sinners, the devil proposes pleasures to hold them; the good spirit stirs conscience with remorse for sins.

2. In souls that have sincerely returned to God, the devil causes sadness, torment of conscience. The good spirit gives courage, energy, good thoughts.

3. Spiritual consolations come from a good spirit: a) when they arouse fervor; b) when they cause tears that are a true expression of interior sorrow and love; c) when they increase faith, hope, love, and bring quiet and peace.

4. As to spiritual desolation or inclination of soul to lower things, when these come we must not make any change as to good resolutions previously formed—hence we see the value of a private rule; We should take advantage of such things to grow in fervor, and rely on divine help, even though it is not felt. We must be patient. We should realize that desolation may be punishment for luke-warmness.

5. In time of consolation gather strength for time of desolation.

6. The devil is weak in the face of resistance, but fiery and cruel to those who yield. He tries to keep the victim from disclosing things to the spiritual director. He attacks the person at his weakest point: so check on that in examination of conscience.

Comments: 1. Both aridity and consolation can be good or bad. God often sends consolations at the second conversion, to help a soul break with things of the world. But this should not continue, or one may love the consolations of God rather than the God of consolations as St. Francis de Sales said, Introduction 4. 13, St. John of the Cross, in Ascent 3. 39. 1 compares consolations to toys. He says if a baby picks up a sharp knife, we do not take it away from him, but instead, dangle a toy before him, so he will drop the knife. God uses consolations this way, to detach souls from this world. Satan may tempt a soul that is having consolations to spiritual pride, to thinking it is a Saint. Or in dryness he may tempt to pride again, to make the soul say: I am a strong soul, I do not need consolations.

Further, aridity may come from the person's fault, or merely from sluggish bodily dispositions. And some by temperament are more inclined to emotion than others—cf. St. Augustine who in his Confessions 9. 4, tells his emotional state after his conversion when he recited Psalm 4.

3. Is there a revelation of the vices and sins of others? This does not always prove a revelation is false, but calls for careful checking. Some Saints have had a knowledge of the secrets of hearts, which helped in reforming souls: S. Joseph of Cupertino, St. Catherine of Siena, St. John Vianney. St. John of the Cross, in *Ascent II*. 26 warns that Satan at times will make false revelations of the sins of others. Further, sometimes seeming knowledge is only the result of imagination. The Secret of Melanie of La Salette has harsh accusations on clergy and religious in the period 1840 to 1865—historically untrue. It was the time of Pius IX, St. John Bosco, St. John Vianney.

4. Is the information useful for salvation of souls? If it is merely to satisfy curiosity it is unlikely to be of divine origin. Some seeming seers act like mediums, give information on births, marriages, legal processes, diseases, political events etc. God does not run an Inquiry Office. Some are very clever at observing and can work with little things. Seances often push furniture about and cause vibrations in musical instruments etc. God does not do these things. Fr. Thurston SJ found cases of what seem to be Poltergeists—spirits that are mischievous, not harmful, not divine. They were not devils, since they did not yield to exorcisms. If a revelation claims to solve a theological problem, it is suspect. Also suspect are revelations that merely give truisms.

A large abundance of revelations taken alone does not disprove. We have cases like this in St. Bridget, St. Gertrude, St. Frances of Rome, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Margaret Mary, St. Ignatius and others.

5. Is all in accord with the dignity and gravity of the Divine Majesty? Some alleged revelations descend into vulgar speech. If there is neurotic exaltation and crowds weeping over their sins as at revivals, it is at least suspect. Satan at times appears taking repulsive shapes. On the other hand, St. Frances of Rome once saw 6 devils in the form of 6 beautiful doves—when she saw through it, they changed to crows and tried to harm her. Satan at times takes on the appearance of Christ Himself.

6. Are there sentiments of peace or disquiet? St. Ignatius considers this sign important. The good Spirit may cause momentary disquiet, but then brings peace. It is the opposite with Satan. But the peace alone will not prove the words are divine.

7. Revelations to direct princes or clergy are suspect: Mary of Agreda kept up correspondence with Philip IV of Spain for 20 years. The King divided his sheets of paper into two columns so she could comment in the opposite column. But the comments are mostly commonplace, with general advice anyone could have given. She had no comments on the King's relaxed morality and his culpable carelessness on things for which he was responsible.

holy mortified men who had false revelations, and even thought they would be the pope. At fifth Lateran Council in 1516 Leo X had to publish an order prohibiting preachers from giving public prophecies. There were many during the French Revolution, clear and in detail on the past, vague on the future.

In the 19th century there was an epidemic of prophecy especially on "the great Pope and the great King" inspired by the 17th century commentary on the Apocalypse by Ven. Holzhauser. Pius IX in an Allocution of April 9, 1872 said: "I do not give much belief to prophecies, because those especially that have come recently do not deserve to be read."

What degree of certainty or probability is possible?

1. When God so wills, He can give full certainty to the recipient. We who are not the recipients can also be sure of revelations given to another, e.g. , the Old Testament prophets, for they furnished certain signs of their mission. This can be done by miracles worked in a framework in which a tie is made between the miracle and the claim.

2. Beyond this area, probability is the most that is attainable. We need then to work with various signs. We should: (a) Get detailed information on the person to whom the revelation seems to have been made; and (b) on what facts seem to have been revealed.

Often we must work by exclusion, i.e. , show that it comes not from the devil, nor from the human mind. But psychology still cannot give full replies on some things that seem supernormal operations of the human mind: hypnotism, somnambulism, telepathy, thought-reading, etc. For data on the uncertainties of psychology see Richard M. Restak, [Neurologist in Washington D. C.] "See no Evil. The Neurological defense would blame violence on the damaged brain" in *The Sciences*, July/August 1992, pp. 16-21.

3. Inquiries to be made about the alleged recipient:

(1) If the person is canonized, the Church has already checked—but canonization does not guarantee the truth of any supposed revelation given to the Saint.

(2) If not canonized: (a) What are the natural qualities or defects, physical, intellectual, and moral. Is he sincere, cool-headed, of sound judgment, of perfect mental equilibrium. Or is his mind weakened by poor health, vigils, fasts etc.

(b) Degree of education of the recipient—what books he has read, what information he may have picked up from other more learned persons.

Much care is needed. Some say that Mary of Agreda was an ignorant girl. But she could read, knew the Bible well, and Cardinal Gotti showed several of her revelations were borrowed from a 15th century book, *The Raptures of Blessed Amadeus*. And she admits the help of theologians. Yet she said, in exaggeration: "No human mind could have imagined this work" (III, # 789).

(c) What virtues does the person have? What was his general level before and after the alleged revelation? If a great advance in holiness is seen, and it seems to have come from the revelation, there is good probability for the revelations. We think of the Fatima children. But if the seer has stayed at the ordinary level of virtue, the visions come under some suspicion, for would God use extraordinary means to lead to a merely ordinary state of holiness? Exception: God might use an ordinary person to help others. The message of Fatima for example would have ample justification even if the children had not become holy: this message God wanted given to the world. And the three things asked for are theologically sound and called for independently of any revelation.

(d) We need to watch out for the work of Satan—he may really promote good things for a while, provided that in the long run he gains. The revelations of Necedah seemed to have good fruits, yet were false. Rosaries were said to change to gold. Similarly for Bayside. But disobedience showed them false. St. Margaret Mary was told by Our Lord: (Autobiography, § 57): "Listen, My Daughter, and do not lightly believe and trust every spirit, for Satan is angry and will try to deceive you. So do nothing without the approval of those who guide you. Being thus under the authority of obedience, his efforts against you will be in vain, for he has no power over the obedient."

Sometimes Satan urges people to immoderate penances, so that they will in time give up. He may make contemplatives desire the active life, or vice versa. Blessed Jordan of Saxony, second General of the Dominicans, contracted a high fever. He had a prior skilled in medicine who told him to sleep on a soft bed. But Satan appeared to Jordan in the night and rebuked his self-indulgence. Jordan gave into this two nights. But the third night Jordan saw that he should obey his doctor, and so did. Jordan had previously put himself under obedience to the doctor.

(e) Humility is a major key. Satan has the greatest horror of it. Cf. the above words of Our Lord to St. Margaret Mary.—Yet Satan can lead a person to false humility. Pride shows in contempt for others, in an independent spirit as to the Superior and the director, in obstinacy in opinions, in refusal to submit to examinations (cf. Teresa Neumann), in anger. It shows too in desiring to publish the graces the person thinks he has received—when it is not necessary. Humility leads to wanting to hide them, except in cases of real usefulness.

(f) Has the person claimed revelations before? Made predictions that were fulfilled? If there was no reason to suppose the failed predictions were conditional, then they will seem not of divine origin.

(g) Has the recipient suffered great trials before or after the revelation, such as sicknesses, contradictions, lack of success. Extraordinary graces are very likely to bring great trials, as St. Teresa of Avila remarked, (cited above), in *Interior Castle* 6. 9. It is specially likely that the recipient will encounter skepticism or hostility. Bl. Juliana of Liege was chosen by God to establish the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament. Visions on it began two years after her entering the novitiate at age 16 in 1208. Only 22 years later did she dare to submit her project to some learned theologians, who approved it, but her enemies got revenge by pillaging her convent. In 1256 the Bishop of Liege established the Feast in one parish in his diocese, but died the same year. The convent was again pillaged. She was calumniated, forced to leave the convent, wandered during the last 20 years of her life, and died at age 66 after fruitless work for 50 years. Finally Pope Urban IV established the feast a century after the start of the revelations.

Yet not always do such things happen. St. Catherine Labouré had early success with the Miraculous Medal.

(h) Has the recipient been fearful of deception, open to Superiors or Director, and never desired revelations? St. Teresa of Avila was told in a vision to found a reformed Carmelite house, but yet did nothing until she had consulted four advisors (Autobiography 32). Mary of Agreda is quite the opposite. St. Ignatius in his rules for first Week, 13, says Satan tries to keep the person from being open. St. Monica as St. Augustine reports desired revelations about his coming marriage—they were false (Confessions 6. 13). So if a revelation has been desired that alone makes it doubtful. This is especially so if answers of pure curiosity are desired or answers to scholastic questions. Mary of Agreda was imprudent here, and was encouraged in imprudence by her confessors.

(i) It is probably good to employ the testimony of expert psychologists as to ecstatic states etc. However, psychology is not so solid and exact a science that absolute trust should be placed in their results.

Further Points to be Checked

1. Do we have an entirely authentic text? Some things have been suppressed or corrected in some cases. There may also have been additions.

2. Is the teaching in full accord with the teachings of the Church and with the certain conclusions of history and of science? If free from all errors, this need not prove it is of divine origin. But also, since there can be mixtures in private revelations, one false teaching need not lead us to conclude that all points are false.