

MARIAN APPARITIONS—
A PRIMER FOR PROTESTANTS
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1. Introduction

This article is entitled “Marian Apparitions-A Primer for Protestants.” Most Protestants are vaguely aware of apparitions of Mary. These apparitions generally, but not exclusively, are experienced by Catholics. Many Protestants have heard names like “Lourdes” or “Fatima” . Protestants are generally unfamiliar with Mary except to know that she was the Mother of Jesus and played a key role in the Nativity. We also know about Mary’s virgin birth of Jesus and accept it as part of our faith. However, most Protestants know little else about Mary. Rosaries are not said; most Protestants do not believe that Mary was sinless but see her as an ordinary but blessed woman who lived a life similar to ours except for being the mother of Jesus. There are no statues of Mary in Protestant Churches. Most Protestants do not know or believe in the immaculate conception of Mary or in her bodily assumption into heaven. Our churches do not have statues of Mary and we do not pray to Mary. In short when it comes to Mary, Protestants have little or no similarities to the Catholic Church.

The Church’s emphasis on devotions to Mary, saying the Rosary and other meditative practices make it more likely that apparitions and visions of Mary will occur. Further, as time has increased the number of apparitions and visions appear to have increased in number. Again, from a historical point of view, the veneration of Mary and the increased honors to her have occurred at the same time as the number of apparitions have increased suggesting the possibility of a causal connection. Apparitions are increasing in the Catholic world not only because of Marian devotional practices but also because apocalyptic warnings are increasing in the world in general including among Protestants. Both Protestants and Catholics believe we are moving nearer to end -time events. Bible studies, sermons and the like are more likely to have an end-time flavor.

Due to the Protestants lack of emphasis upon Mary and the fact that Protestants do not have devotions or pray to Mary or “venerate” her, it is difficult for a Protestant to understand or accept Marian apparitions or visions of Mary. It simply is not within our frame of reference. Notwithstanding all of these differences, a few Protestants have seen apparitions of Mary or have experienced visions of Mary. However, those who do are not likely to say anything about it and are likely to treat an apparition of Mary similar to an encounter with aliens. They fear mentioning it, because to do so will subject them to ridicule among their Protestant friends who might conclude that they have taken leave of their senses. Further, Protestant leadership is as likely to attribute an apparition of Mary to having negative, and perhaps even demonic, overtones.

Moreover, to a Protestant, it is unlikely that God would use Mary to speak to the heart of Catholics (much less the world) because Mary is not within the frame of reference of most Protestants. A message from Mary to the world would be almost like a message or apparition of Buddha calling for the world to repent.

However, not all Protestants would agree with this extreme position. In fact, some, like this author, are open to the possibility that God may use more than one means to call his people (including Catholics) to repentance and devotion to Him by a variety of methods. There are currently estimated to be 1.3 billion Catholics in the world. It is not beyond belief that God could use apparitions of Mary to reach his people

and seek to restore their hearts and devotion to Him. Also, Protestants might reconsider their approach to Mary. If the Catholic Church has overemphasized Mary, it is possible that the Protestant Church may have under-emphasized the role of Mary.

In my opinion, the development of Mary in the Catholic Church is causally connected to the elevation of celibacy among the priesthood. Protestants have also rejected the value of celibacy among the priest/pastor positions and this too contributes to the differences of approaches to Mary by Protestants and Catholics.

In this age, where people are dealing with ideas of gender and the role of women in modern society, it is perhaps time to review our concepts of Mary and to see what she has to say to the modern church. Admittedly, both Catholics and Protestants have subordinated the role of women in the church in large part thanks to the treatment of women in history and in both the Jewish and Christian faiths and even worse treatment of women under Islam. In large part, the dialog on this issue has been shaped by the views of the Catholic Church on women and the value of celibacy especially as to those ministering before God.

Another consideration is the matter of faith. It seems that both healings and miracles are more likely to occur where they are expected and where we have faith for those things. In the Protestant Church there is little expectation or faith that apparitions will occur be they of Jesus or Mary. At the same churches, Protestants may have faith for healings and for the gifts of Christ to manifest themselves. The Catholic Church has left open an expectation and faith for supernatural apparitions especially apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Therefore it is not altogether surprising that where the Catholic Church has faith for apparitions, they are more likely to have apparitions. Therefore faith and expectation and openness to the possibility of an apparition may be the real factor driving the differences between the Protestant and Catholic experience.

In this article we will look at what a Marian Apparition is, how the Catholic Church deals with Marian apparitions and how it also protects itself from them. Lastly we will review a small group of Marian apparitions so that as Protestants we can understand them better.

Finally, my hope is that those who read this article do so with a generous spirit and an open mind. God does not always work with us all in the same manner. We serve a diverse God who has been creative in the many avenues which he has given us to get to know him better and more intimately.

II. What is a Marian Apparition

A Marian apparition is a physical appearance of Mary in the environment. It is considered to be an objective event rather than just subjective experience. It is different than a vision, dream or miracle associated with a painting or a statue. The apparition may be silent or it may speak; however, generally some type of message is associated with the apparition.

Sometimes the messages are specific. Others call for increased adoration of the Virgin. Still others call for repentance. The appearances may be to those who are involved in religious work but they are just as likely to come to the humble, to children or to those who are in the midst of difficulties. Some

apparitions occur where no word is said, but still bring a message of hope and belief in the miraculous in this dark world.

Marian apparitions can come on just one occasion or can occur on numerous occasions over many years.

The appearances often bring hope and encouragement. Sometimes the appearances are welcomed by local religious authorities; but they are just as often unwelcomed and rejected and only become accepted over time and after extensive investigations.

Sometimes the Marian apparitions have been accompanied by other phenomena including celestial events, visions, miracles, healings, and on some occasions unexplained phenomena associated with objects such as statues or other articles. The supernatural events associated with an apparition are generally not considered the purpose of the apparition but as a way of validating an apparition.

III. How is a Marian Apparition is Approved by the Church

I have in another writing commented about how the Catholic Church's testing of apparitions is similar to the way that Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches test prophecies. That comparison is set forth below:

In the case of personal prophecy and the Marian apparition or vision, those in charge of the religious structure must have a means of testing the prophecy or the apparition. In the case of the prophetic, many Pentecostals have done this by means of testing the prophecies by having them reviewed and tested by other prophets. Sometimes prophecies or personal revelations are tested by the pastor of the church. In all cases the prophecies cannot be contrary to the written word of God as found in Scripture. Likewise apparitions have to be tested by the Catholic Church as well before they are definitively accepted.

The Catholic Church has wisely placed the primary responsibility on determining the evaluation of an apparition upon the bishop who oversees the area where the apparition takes place. This initial authority was set forth in The Twenty-Fifth Session of the Council of Trent in 1563 in dealing with relics and sacred images. That Session held the following:

And that these things may be the more faithfully observed, the holy Synod ordains that no one be allowed to place, or cause to be placed, any unusual image, in any place, or church, howsoever exempted, except that image have been approved by the bishop: also, that no new miracles are to be acknowledged, or new relics recognized, unless the said bishop has taken cognizance and approved thereof; who, as soon as he has obtained some certain information in regard to these matters, shall, after having taken the advice of theologians, and of other pious men, act therein as he shall judge to be consonant with truth and piety. But if any doubtful, or difficult abuse has to be extirpated; or, in fine, if any more grave question shall arise touching these matters, the bishop, before deciding the controversy, shall await the sentence of the metropolitan and of the bishops of the province, in a provincial Council; yet so, that nothing new, or that previously has not been usual in the Church, shall be resolved on, without having first consulted the most holy Roman Pontiff.

Despite the standards set forth by the Council of Trent, no Marian apparition was carefully investigated until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In most cases, the bishop over the diocese where the apparition occurs makes an investigation of the apparition. Often the bishop will appoint a group of people to investigate the apparition. If the bishop determines that a supernatural appearance has occurred, then the apparition is considered to be approved by the Church unless the approval is subsequently reversed by ecclesiastical authorities such as a synod or the Papacy. Once the bishop has made a positive determination, the apparition is considered to be “worthy of belief” and not contrary to the faith and the morals of the Church. In the vast majority of the cases the decision of the bishop is not challenged by higher ecclesiastical authorities. However, interestingly, in 2015, Archbishop Arguelles of the Philippines concluded that a 1948 series of apparitions to a novice in the Carmelite order had shown “supernatural character” and was “worthy of belief.” A few months later that decision was overturned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which is in charge of reviewing apparitions on behalf of the Papacy.

There have been thousands of apparitions over the years. In most instances, the Papacy abides by the decision of the local bishop and says nothing. However, the Papacy has approved a few apparitions. Papal approval can be evidenced by setting a feast day for the apparition such as for Our Lady of Guadalupe. There are other ways of evidencing papal approval such as attending a mass to celebrate the apparition, sending a golden rose, crowning a statue of the apparition, and making a public statement supporting the apparition. All of these means are only “informal” approvals of the apparition. (Pope Paul VI presented through a legate a Golden Rose which had blessed to the Shrine of Fatima in 1964 and Pope Benedict XVI gave a second Golden Rose to the Shrine of Fatima on a pilgrimage to Fatima in 2010.)



Pope Benedict XVI and Fatima Rose

Out of the many apparitions, the papacy has approved less than 30 out of the many of the apparitions over the years. In fact the exact number of apparitions approved can be debated based upon the criteria which is utilized to determine what is approved and what is not.

One of the departments of the Roman Curia works with bishops to evaluate apparitions. That department is known as The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (“CDF”) and represents the Pope. This department helps to protect the Church from heresy. Most of us would have greater familiarity with this department from its old name which was the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the

Roman and Universal Inquisition. However these days the term “inquisition” has negative connotations so the Papacy has cleaned up its image.

The CDC set forth some standards for the Bishops in reviewing and evaluating apparitions in 1978. At first these standards were secret but gradually leaked to the press. In 2012, the CDC issued an English translation of these standards which are called “Norms for the Discernment of Apparitions, 1978.” (“Norms”). Below is a summarization of the Norms.

The Norms provide that public manifestation of the cult or devotion should not occur until the bishop has reviewed various positive and negative criteria. After there has been an investigation of the facts relating to the apparition, the bishop must have determined that there is a great probability that the facts are true. Some of the positive criteria would be:

- The person reporting the apparition must be honest, moral and obedient to the authority of the Church.
- There is no theological or other error in the revelation.
- There is healthy spiritual fruit from the event such as a spirit of prayer, healings, conversions etc.

In addition, according to the Norms, the bishop should determine that there are no negative criteria such as the following:

- Error regarding the facts reported.
- Doctrinal errors attributed to God himself or to Mary.
- Evidence that there is a profit motive associated with the apparition.
- Grave immorality by the person experiencing the apparition.
- Psychological disorders or psychopathic tendencies in the person experiencing the apparition.

Even if the apparition is approved by the local bishop, ecclesiastical authorities can intervene at any time if they feel the devotion needs correction or if there is a doctrinal or other problem. Such ecclesiastical authorities might be the bishop, a regional or national Conference of bishops or the Papacy itself.

Interestingly, as I have commented previously, I see some parallels between the judgement of an apparition by the Church and the testing of a prophecy by Pentecostal or Charismatic Protestant Churches. In the Protestant Church, a prophecy would never be in opposition to or contradict Scripture. In the Catholic Church an apparition or a message from God through a vision or otherwise would never contradict Scripture or contradict the teachings and doctrine of the Catholic Church. Further, a Protestant Church might at least consider the character of a person bringing the word of God as would the Catholic Church consider the character of a person experiencing the apparition. In addition, the Catholic Church would test the “fruits” of the apparition just as the Protestant Church might test the “fruits” of a prophecy or a word from God.

Wisely, I think, the Church does not approve every apparition. In some instances, it is silent but tacitly allows pilgrimages and local celebrations of an Apparition to occur without having the apparition approved.

The Papacy takes the position that some apparitions if not approved will simply wither away with time. However, if God wants the apparition to be celebrated, it will continue despite the passage of time.

From my standpoint, the Catholic Church has done a respectable job in trying to stay balanced on the tightrope where there is complete skepticism on one side and a slavish credulity to every imagination on the other. By having apparitions put to a semi-scientific test on one side and looking for good fruits at the same time, the Catholic Church has done a decent job in filtering out some of the more dubious apparitions. As a Protestant, I find it almost surprising that the Catholic Church may be more open to the supernatural experiences at least in the areas of apparitions and visions than perhaps a less forgiving Protestant church.

IV. Apparitions are not Mandatory (Private as Opposed to Public Revelations)

Apparitions are considered to be private revelations as opposed to public revelations. In other words, Christ has been fully revealed in Scripture. Apparitions do not really add to Scripture or to the dogma of the Church. Apparitions do not add to revelation but they only assist in helping people to discern the already complete revelation of Christ during the time in which they live.

The concept of no new revelation is set forth in Items 66 and 67 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which reads as follows:

66. The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet even if revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.

67. Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of the faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the *mysterium* of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church.

Christian faith cannot accept "revelations" that claim to surpass or correct the revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such "revelations."

To summarize, an apparition or a message resulting from an apparition is not a public revelation but instead is a private revelation. It does not come to bring new doctrine but is a means of clarifying what is already divinely revealed. As a result it can be accepted or ignored by any Catholic at their choosing. If a person finds that the apparition blesses them then they are free to express their devotion.

Interestingly, this is again similar to the treatment of a prophecy or a word of knowledge by a Pentecostal or Charismatic Church. If the word spoken resonates with you and is not contrary to

Scripture then a person is welcome to embrace it. The decision of whether to embrace the experience is up to the individual. It is not forced.

In both Catholic and Protestant Churches, there is a freedom given to the individual to deal with the experience as they are led in their heart.

V. Examples of Marian Apparitions

Below are some examples of some of the Marian Apparitions. Some are well known; others are less so. The majority of these have papal approval but others do not.

Our Lady of Guadalupe



Location: Tepeyac (Northern part of Mexico City), Mexico.

Dates of Apparitions: 1531

Witnesses of Apparitions: Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin and Juan Bernardino

Short Description: Juan Diego was an Aztec who had recently converted to Catholicism. He saw an apparition of Mary who asked that a church be built on the spot where she appeared and that she would offer love, help, compassion and protection. She instructed Juan Diego to seek permission from the Bishop of Mexico, City. The bishop was not interested and Juan Diego returned to Mary and asked

her to send someone more worthy. Mary sent Juan Diego back and he was rejected once again by the Bishop. On the third visit the Bishop asked for a sign from Mary to substantiate the appearance. Mary promised to heal Juan Diego's uncle Juan Bernardino. She also instructed Juan Diego to collect roses (it was December) from the hill at Tepeyac and put them in his cloak and take them to the Bishop. Juan Diego did this. When he dumped out the roses before the Bishop, there was an imprint of the Lady of Guadalupe on his cloak. In addition Mary appeared to the uncle of Diego and pronounced him healed of his illness.

Message, if any: That a church was to be built and that Mary would offer love, help, compassion and protection.

Related Miraculous Events: The healing of Juan Bernardino. In addition, Juan Diego's cloak should have had a life of about 20 years because of the materials of which it was made but has existed since that time and is on display today. The Image of Mary on the cloak has been scientifically investigated several times and the image of the Virgin appears to be imprinted on the cloak and was not painted on .

Approval of Apparition: The Bishop approved the apparition in 1555. Twenty-five different popes have given decrees regarding the image of the Lady of Guadalupe. The first pope to recognize it was Pope Gregory XIII in 1575. The image has been crowned three times at the instructions of various popes. Pope John Paul II visited Mexico on five different occasions on each occasion prayed before the image. A golden rose has been presented to the image.

Feast Day, if any: December 12.

Annual Pilgrims: 10 million,

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal



Location: Paris, France

Dates of Apparitions: 1830

Witnesses of Apparitions: Catherine LaBoure

Short Description: The apparition appeared to Catherine LaBoure who was a novice of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. Catherine was instructed by Mary to make a medallion in the form shown above. Mary promised that great graces which would be provided to those who wore the medal with confidence and asked for the graces. The novice reported the apparitions to her mother superior and her spiritual director. After many challenges and difficulties, the Medal was produced.

On the front side is Mary. Below her feet is the date of 1830 when the apparition appeared to St. Catherine. On the outside it says, "Mary conceived without sin" referring to the Immaculate Conception. It also says "Pray for us who have recourse to you". Around her head is a halo with twelve stars and represents the woman in Revelation. On the opposite side is an "M" signifying Mary and the "M" is intertwined with the cross showing the closeness of Mary to the suffering of Christ on the cross. Below are emblems for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Around the edge on the back again are twelve stars representing the woman clothed with the sun (Rev. 12:1) and the twelve stars representing the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles (the full church of God).

Catherine LaBoure spent the last forty six years of her life working anonymously in her order taking care of the sick and her identity as the person who had been the visionary was not revealed to the other sisters in the order until she was on her death bed.

Between 1832 (when the medal was first struck) and St. Catherine's death in 1876 over a billion medals were struck.

Message, if any: A special medal was to be struck. The medal was to have a cross with the "M" for Mary and pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

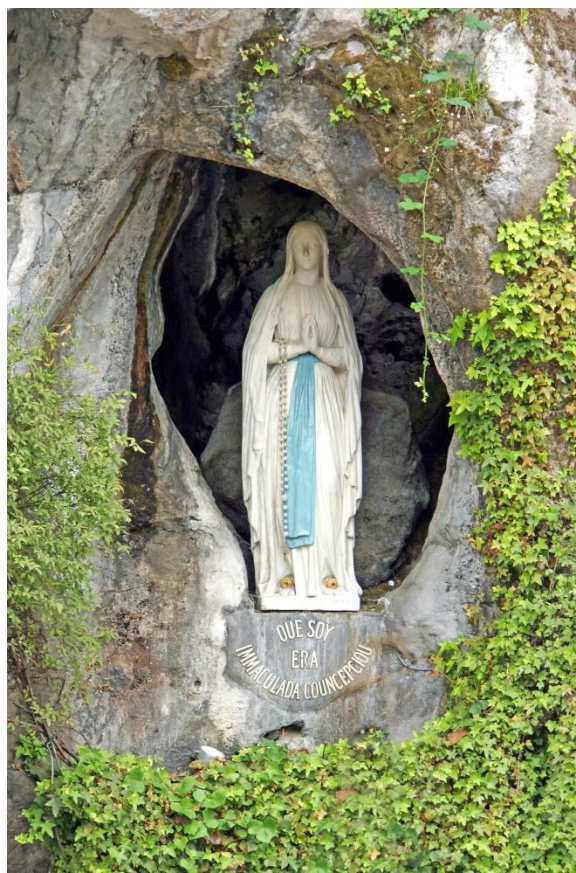
Related Miraculous Events: Catherine Boure's body did not decay but resides in a crystal -sided reliquary in the chapel where she had her first vision.

Approval of Apparition: The apparition was approved by Archbishop Hyacinthe-Louis de Quelen of Paris in 1836. Since 1832 when 1500 pieces were manufactured, billions of medals have been produced. Medals have been worn by Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX. Many miracles have been attributed to the medals.

Feast Day, if any: November 27.

Annual Pilgrims: 2 million.

Our Lady of Lourdes



Location: Lourdes, France

Dates of Apparitions: 1858

Witnesses of Apparitions: Bernadette Soubirous

Short Description: Mary appeared to Bernadette (age 14) on 18 different occasions with the first time occurring when Bernadette was gathering firewood. During the apparitions Mary said little except on one occasion said: "Penance, Penance, Penance. Pray for sinners." On one occasion Mary told Bernadette to drink from the fountain and bathe in it. There was no fountain in the area. Bernadette began to dig the ground with her hands and a fountain began to form. Since that day Pilgrims have bathed in that fountain that developed and have drunk the water which appeared there. Bernadette joined the Sisters of Charity Nevers. She lived in the convent for 13 years and died of Tuberculosis.

In one apparition Mary said: "I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the next one." To me this sounds similar to Jesus' statement: "In this world you shall have tribulation, but rejoice I have come to overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33).

Many pilgrims come to wash in the waters of Lourdes and many candles are burnt to represent prayers. Each year over 700 tons of candles are burned at Lourdes.

Cures considered to be "medically unexplainable" from Lourdes go through an intense examination by the International Lourdes Medical Committee which is made up of a panel of doctors some who are not Catholic or even believers. A full investigation may be done as quickly as five years or as long as ten to twelve years and must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the International Lourdes Medical Committee. For a cure to reach the status of being "medically unexplainable" the following things must occur:

- The original diagnosis must be confirmed medically.
- The diagnosis must be considered to be "un-curable."
- The cure must be associated with a visit to Lourdes.
- The cure must be immediate
- The cure must be complete.
- The cure must be permanent.

Thus far there have been over sixty "medically unexplainable" cures out of thousands of cures at Lourdes.

Message, if any: A chapel was to be built where Mary appeared and processions held there. In the 16th Apparition, Mary said: "I am the Immaculate Conception." A chapel was built at the location of the apparitions.

Related Miraculous Events: Over sixty cures have been classified as "miraculous" or "medically unexplainable" by the Catholic Church. Lourdes is a very popular place of pilgrimage with many people bathing in the waters there. The body of Bernadette after death was "incorruptible" and is on display.

Approval of Apparition: The apparition was approved in 1862 by Bishop Bertrand-Severe Laurence of the Diocese of Tarbes

Feast Day, if any: February 11.

Annual Pilgrims: 6 million.

Our Lady of Knock



Location: Knock, Ireland

Dates of Apparitions: 1879

Witnesses of Apparitions: Group of 15 People

Short Description: A group of 15 people with ages from 5 to 75 including men, women and children saw the apparition against the back wall of the church. They saw an altar with a lamb on it. They also saw angels, Mary, Joseph and St. John who was dressed as a bishop. The apparition lasted for an hour and a half. The area was an extremely poor area. The apparition was investigated in 1879 and again in 1936. All of the witnesses were considered reliable.

Message, if any: No message.

Related Miraculous Events: The apparition was seen in the rain but no rain touched the apparition or the ground around it.

Approval of Apparition: Archbishop John MacHale of the Archdiocese of Tuam. Four popes have honored the Shrine at Knock in various ways. Pope John Paul II made a pilgrimage to Knock to worship at the shrine.

Feast Day, if any: August 17

Annual Pilgrims: 1.5 million.

Our Lady of Fatima



Location: Fatima, Portugal

Dates of Apparitions: 1917

Witnesses of Apparitions: Lucia Santos; Jacinta Marto, Francisco Marto.

Short Description: Three young children at ages 11, 10 and 9 saw an angel who called himself the Guardian Angel of Portugal and then saw various apparitions of Mary and were given three secrets.

Message, if any: The first secret is that hell is real and people need to say the Rosary, pray and make devotions to the Immaculate Heart of Mary so that people will be saved from hell. The second secret was that there would be various political upheavals including wars and they could only be stopped by consecrating Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and by continuing to say the Rosary. The third secret was that there would be a future time of persecution for the Catholic Church. Mary promised a miracle to substantiate the visions which occurred with the Miracle of the Sun discussed below.

The two youngest children were prophesied to have early deaths by Mary and they both died within two years of the apparition from influenza. The oldest child, Lucia, entered the Order of St. Dorothy in Vilar as a postulant and then later became a Carmelite Nun. She died at age 97 in 2005.

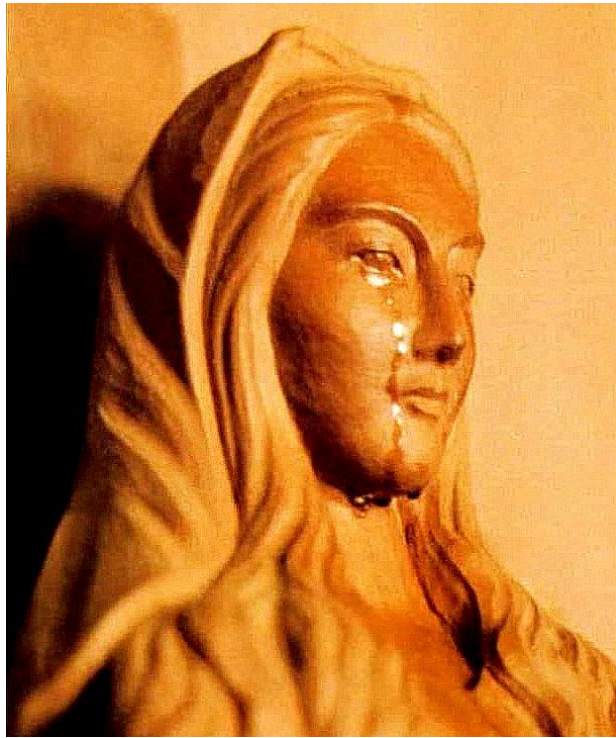
Related Miraculous Events: The Miracle of the Sun was seen by over 70,000 people. People saw the sun dance, emit various lights and appear to fall toward the earth and then resume its place. The body of Jacinta Marto remained uncorrupted after death.

Approval of Apparition: Approved in 1930 by Bishop Jose Alves Correia da Silva, Diocese of Leiria. All of the popes since the apparition have indicated by various means that they believe the Fatima revelations were real. Pope John Paul II believed that that Our Lady of Fatima saved him after he was shot on her feast day in 1981. He dedicated the bullet to Our Lady of Fatima.

Feast Day, if any: May 13

Annual Pilgrims: 4 million.

Our Lady of Akita



Location: Akita, Japan

Dates of Apparitions: 1973

Witnesses of Apparitions: Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa

Short Description: Sister Agnes was totally deaf and was a convert from Buddhism. She was a member of the Handmaids of the Holy Eucharist and lived a life of prayer. Sister Agnes had visions of involving her guardian angel. She and the angel began to pray before a statue of Mary carved by a

Buddhist sculpturer and known as The Lady of All Nations. As she was praying, she felt that the statue came to life and stated that she would be healed. She was also encouraged to pray for the pope, bishops and priests.

Sister Agnes had a cross- shaped wound on her left hand. In addition, there was a cross- shaped wound on the hand of the statue and blood ran down the statues hand. The wound on the statue remained for three months even after Agnes wound mysteriously disappeared.

Message, if any: God was angry at mans' sin. Just as Jesus was nailed to the cross with three nails, man needed to be fastened to the cross with the nails of poverty, chastity and obedience. God was going to bring a terrible punishment upon humanity involving fire falling from the sky and wiping out people both good and bad if people did not repent. People were to pray the Rosary and pray for the pope, the bishops and priests. Satan would sow disunity in the Church with cardinals opposing cardinals and priests opposing priests and there would be a persecution of those who were true followers by those who accepted compromise.

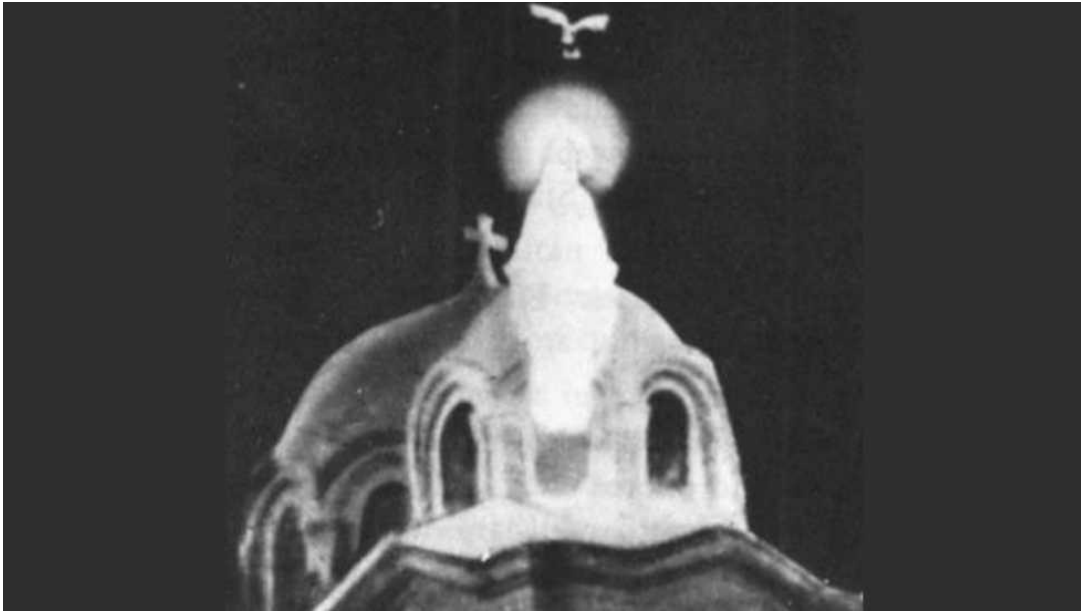
Related Miraculous Events: Blood came from a statue. On another occasion, the statue was covered with moisture. Some of the moisture was collected on clumps of cotton and sent to the University of Akita where it was determined to have come from a human and had a pleasant fragrance. In 1975, the statue began to weep and did so three times a day being witnessed both by nuns and the bishop. It wept over a hundred different times. In 1982 the deafness of Sister Agnes was miraculously cured as had been prophesied by the apparition while Sister Agnes was at Sunday Mass.

Approval of Apparition: Approved in 1984 by Bishop John Shojiro Ito of the Diocese of Niigata after eight years of investigations.

Feast Day, if any: June 12.

Annual Pilgrims: Unknown.

Our Lady of Zeitoun



Framed Photo at Zeitoun showing Apparitions.
I took the above photo of the bottom two framed photos on a visit to
St. Mary's in 2017.

Location: Cairo, Egypt

Dates of Apparitions: 1968 until 1971 on numerous of occasions.

Witnesses of Apparitions: Many thousands of people saw the apparitions.

Short Description: The first appearance occurred to a Muslim mechanic who thought he saw a woman on top of the church that he thought was going to jump off. Instead lights surrounded the woman and the first apparition occurred. The next day the Muslim mechanic went to a doctor to have his finger amputated from gangrene and when the bandages were removed the finger was healed and the mechanic was sent home. Various apparitions appeared over a two to three year period. They appeared as lights and different shapes over the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mary in the Zeitoun District of Cairo. These lights were captured by newspaper photographs and on the news media. They would occur over several hours. Sometimes there would be shapes of the Virgin and sometimes there would be shapes of doves. Sometimes the apparitions would occur for two to three hours. They were seen by both Muslims and Christians. The police in Cairo searched for miles around the church looking for a projector or other device to cause the illuminations but found nothing which could have caused the apparition. The Egyptian government investigated the apparition and was unable to explain it. The President of Egypt, Nasser, also witnessed the apparition. The apparition is notable because it was seen by somewhere between 250,000 to two million people of all faiths.

Message, if any: No spoken message.

Related Miraculous Events: Conversions to Christianity and medical cures. The apparition helped to strengthen the Christian faith in Egypt.

Approval of Apparition: In 1968 these apparitions were approved by Cyril VI of the Patriarchate of Cairo. Pope Paul VI deferred to the Coptic church but sent a papal envoy to Cairo to investigate the apparition. A formal report to the papacy was made by the papal envoy substantiating the apparition.

Feast Day, if any: None.

Annual Pilgrims: Unknown.

Instances Where Apparitions Were Not Approved.

There are two examples of apparitions which have been rejected after review. We have previously discussed one of these which was the vision of Teresita Castillo in 1948 of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces in Lipa, Philippines. This apparition was rejected by a panel of bishops and their decision was confirmed by the CDF. Although a local bishop tried to overrule the initial decision of the panel of bishops, the CDF and Pope Pius XII in 1951 overruled the local bishop denying that the supernatural was involved.

Another instance in which an apparition was denied was the case of appearances to Ida Peerdeman in Amsterdam, Netherlands between 1945-1959. In 1956, the Bishop of Haarlem concluded that the

apparitions were not of a “supernatural nature.”. This decision was confirmed by the CDF in 1974 and again in 2021 when a successor bishop tried to approve the apparition.

These two instances demonstrate that the Catholic Church will review apparitions and take action if they believe an error has been made by local ecclesiastical authorities.

VI. Conclusions

Apparitions in the Catholic world are increasing. Most apparitions are of Mary. Despite the many apparitions, the Papacy has generally left the initial decision as to whether an apparition is authentic to the bishop of the locality where the apparition occurs. However, from time to time the Papacy has stepped in to allow celebrations of an apparition or to allow pilgrimages such as in the case of Our Lady of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina where no decision has been made and some have expressed doubt about the apparition. Nevertheless, in that instance, pilgrimages have been allowed even though the apparition has neither been approved by the bishop or the papacy.

To the Protestant mind, the first instinct is to dismiss these apparitions because they involve Mary who does not have the elevated stature among Protestants that she has among Catholics. In addition, Protestants are likely to reject the apparitions because Mary often calls for increased devotion to herself, the saying of the Rosary, praying for the popes, bishops and priests and calls for acts which resonate more among Catholics instead Protestants.

At the same time, there are certain aspects of the apparitions with which Protestants can identify. First there is an identification with the supernatural, the call to repentance, the need for increased religious devotion and the existence of miracles substantiating the apparitions. Also there is an identification by the Protestants that God is calling the humble, that He is seeking that the world repent, and that there is an upcoming disaster if mankind fails to repent. The prophecies regarding wars, fire falling, the dissension between good followers of Christ and carnal followers of Christ all resonate with us. As Protestants we are used to seeing people healed after prayer and therefore the reports of people humbling themselves and being healed we can also identify with. Further, that God would bless places which are unknown and which have experienced hardship such as Knock, Ireland after the Potato Famine, poverty stricken places such as Fatima or Bosnia seem to express the love of God for the poor and those in need of mercy and comfort. God seems to have a way of favoring little known places whether they be Nazareth, Knock, Ireland or Fatima, Portugal.

One of the issues for Christians in considering apparitions to keep in mind is that there are approximately 1.3 Billion Catholics in the world. Somehow, we Protestants expect God to deal with Catholics just as He deals with us. We are reminded of the joke about when one man asked an angel about why there was a wall around a small section of heaven. The angel responded that the wall had to be built because the group inside the wall thought that they were the only people who were in heaven. Although it is only a joke, it does illustrate how we as Protestants seem to see our world only through Protestant glasses. God in his mercy and through the love shown by Jesus Christ desires that many come to know him and to be saved. He deals with us who are Protestants despite our biases and

He deals with Catholics in accordance with the beliefs they have developed over two thousand years to follow him.

As indicated by me in another article, the Catholic Church has loaded up Mary with so many honors that she is almost on par with, but a little lower than, Jesus. Although the Catholic Church has tried to keep Mary in a slightly minor place theologically, in the area of devotion, daily honor and practice she has been placed on a par with Jesus.

As Protestants, we need to be open to the possibility that God is using the apparitions of Mary as a way of accomplishing a number of objectives in these last days. Some of the things which may be going on include:

- To rekindle a devotion to Christ in these last days.
- To call Catholics and the world to repentance.
- To reach Catholics with the feminine characteristics of God.
- Speaking prophetically to his people without going through a male-dominated hierarchy.
- Renewing a belief in miracles and supernatural occurrences in Christianity
- Renewing direct spiritual experiences among the people apart from the sacramental experience.

In short, the attraction to the Catholic laity is that Mary speaks to them in Catholic Theological Clothing as opposed to Protestant dress. Moreover, Mary has to some extent escaped from a male-dominated, celibate clergy and stands on her own two feet giving messages to the church and the world which even the papacy cannot always control.

One of the seminal issues is why there are so many apparitions of Mary and so few of Jesus. I believe that the answer is that the Catholic Church has built its present devotional emphasis more around Mary than around Jesus despite the fact that the formal position of the Church and its theologians is that devotions to Mary lead to a great devotion and love to Jesus. As a practical matter, I suspect that they begin with Mary and end with Mary and Jesus is forced into a subordinate role devotionally despite the fact that he has a formal place above Mary theologically. In fact, Mary has become the power behind the throne and whatever Mary wants, Mary gets. In short Jesus is head of the theological house, but if you want to get things done, you need to go to the power behind the throne which is Mary. Moreover, the Church, by heaping honor after honor upon Mary, has made Mary a miniature Jesus, however one who is more approachable and who has more sympathy with the ills and hardships of mankind. After all, Jesus has only five wounds, whereas Mary has seven swords piercing her making her Our Lady of Sorrows.

Finally, a small hope in writing this article, is to encourage Protestants to put their swords back into their scabbards and give God the room to work with the 1.3 billion Catholics in the world. In these last days, the Holy Spirit seeks to break down borders among those who love him. It is for this reason that sometimes the unlikely or unthinkable may occur. For instance, in more than one instance, Mary has had the temerity to appear in a vision or apparition to a straight-laced evangelical Sunday School teacher or other person who would be an unlikely recipient of a Marian apparition or vision. Moreover in a few instances we see things like the stigmata (signs of Christ's wounds) appearing among non-Catholics. Instances such as this remind us that God still knows how to "work outside the box" and is not always required to work in accordance with our preconceptions and theology. In the Instance, of Marian apparitions, my advice would be for Protestants to stay out of the way and allow God to work

among Catholics as He pleases. Moreover, we could learn from the experience of the Catholic Church in being open to apparitions and visions.



Padre Pio with Stigmata
After Communion